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NANA

The Great Realistic Novel.

BY

ÉMILE ZOLA.

PHILADELPHIA:
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306 CHESTNUT STREET.

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(SEQUEL TO "L'ASSOMMOIR.")

BY ÉMILE ZOLA.

AUTHOR OF "L'ASSOMMOIR," "THE GIRL IN SCARLET," "CLAUDE'S CONFESSION," "POT-BOUILLE," "THERESE RAQUIN," "MYSTERIES OF MARSEILLES," "HELENE," "MAGDALEN FERAT," "A MAD LOVE; OR, THE ABBE AND HIS COURT," "THE MYSTERIES OF THE COURT OF LOUIS NAPOLEON," "LA BELLE LISA; OR, THE PARIS MARKET GIRLS," "ALBINE; OR, THE ABBE'S TEMPTATION," ETC.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY JOHN STIRLING.

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED.

NANA is a sequel to and continuation of L'ASSOMMOIR; but it deals with other scenes than those portrayed in its predecessor. NANA has a terrible intensity about it. The heroine is a variety actress, whose charming face and magnificent figure create a furore amongst the fashion of Paris, and the work is a recital of her daily life, on and off the boards—a life of perpetual excitement, and of uninterrupted intrigue. Both behind the scenes and at her rooms she is constantly surrounded by a crowd of attendants, which counts among its number not only the ordinary men about town, but also members of the nobility, and even a scion of royalty itself—old and young, the rich and the impecunious, are dragged along at her chariot wheels, as though she were a veritable queen of the olden time. The book is a wonderful performance. NANA has created a great sensation abroad, and has been hailed by the Press, both of London and Paris, as the literary event of years, over four hundred thousand copies of NANA and L'ASSOMMOIR having been already sold in France.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

THE publication at Paris, in the "Voltaire," on the 15th of October, of the first chapter of NANA, was hailed by the Press, both of London and Paris, as the literary event of the day.

We now present it to American readers, and they must judge for themselves of the merits of this last work by an author, who is now the most discussed and most read in Europe.

NANA is a continuation of L'ASSOMMOIR; but NANA in no way resembles L'ASSOMMOIR. It is elaborated with the same care; it is as real, as intense, and as bold as its predecessor, but it places before us a totally different world, and with all the "brutal justice of a photograph."

This time we are not conducted to the workshop and to the forge—to homes of poverty and

drunkenness—or to the terrible places where the liquor that stupefies and embrutes is sold. Our Author, instead, gives us in NANA, a careful study of the manners and life of that class, whose principal business in life is to be amused, which class, ordinary romance-writers designate as "men of elegant leisure."

He shows us how a woman of the people, a *fille* like NANA, born of four or five generations of vicious drunken ancestors, preys upon, ruins and corrupts the aristocracy, and we will now let our author speak for himself. We quote from a newspaper article which he has just published.

"Journal after journal," he says, "has been laid before me by an obliging friend. To many of the critiques contained therein, I wish to make here a brief reply. Some of these gentlemen demonstrate to their own satisfaction, and in four lines, that all my observations are false, and based on the most shallow grounds. They are told that I spend several months of the year in the country—that is enough for them. I am in their eyes a country lout who knows nothing of Paris. Another has heard a preposterous tale of a visit that I was said

to have made to a lady—a visit of an hour, when, be it understood, she was driving in the Bois! It is on this somewhat slight basis of information that they claim I wrote NANA.

"It seems that a man may spend a year and a half in collecting material for a work, and then another six months in writing his book—at the end of which time no one has the right to accuse him of ignorance, whatever may be said of his lack of ability—while these critics write an article on the corner of a table, which takes them an hour or two, and then declare that I know nothing of the matter on which I have spent time, strength, observation and energy, for nearly two years.

"Is not this rather absurd?

"I am quite ready to admit, that in NANA, I approach a world—the mysteries of which these gentlemen claim to have thoroughly mastered.

"They wink at each other, and declare that the ways and argot of these *filles* cannot be understood, unless a man leaves in their hands, his reputation and his fortune. I have taken pains to consult various authorities—the Goncourts and *La Vie Parisienne*—but in none could I find anything

except an affectation of a certain elegance that does not in reality exist.

"In short, I know not of one single book which describes the *fille* as she really is. There is no truth in the picture, no vitality in the form!

"My purpose has been a most simple one. I have endeavored to paint this class of women as they exist in real life, and thus utter a vehement protest against Marion Delorme—La Dame Aux Camelias—Marco—and Musette; in fact against that long procession of Vice, which I consider destructive to morality, and as having a most pernicious effect upon the imaginations of young girls.

"As to the sources of my information, they are natural enough. I have used both eyes and ears. It is the first time to my knowledge, that an author has been put on a stool of repentance, and bidden to confess where he has been, and where he has not been; what he has done, and what he has not done. My life does not belong to the public, although my books do! I simply desire to state that the incidents of NANA are purely imaginative.

"Once again let me ask, if a novelist is expected

to live the life of all the characters he depicts? Am I to be in turn a priest, a cabinet minister, an inebriate, a *charcutier* and a Banker? Is this possible? No; we must be permitted to be lookers-on the greater part of the time—rather than actors. I will not here argue the opinion which I entertain, that a man who is outside of the world he wishes to describe, is oftener far better calculated to do it justice, than those who are within it."

In conclusion the translator would simply add that the excitement in Europe over NANA, is only to be compared with that in Italy in regard to THÉRÈSE RAQUIN, which is now being played every evening in Naples, Rome, Palermo, Florence, Milan and Venice. It was the enormous success of the Italian adaptation of L'ASSOMMOIR, which gave the idea simultaneously to these various managers of dramatizing THÉRÈSE RAQUIN, which is to be followed as speedily as possible with NANA, also to be produced at all the principal theatres in the United States.

However this may be, it is at all events not a bad thing for morality, whether it be a good thing

or not for literary art, that ZOLA should have been moved to describe with cold and clear precision, scenes alluring to imaginative youth, simply because they have not before been described in a similar spirit. He paints the Paris of the Empire for the reproof and warning of the Paris of the Republic. NANA throws no glamour over self-indulgence, nor lends a charm to characters essentially false and corrupt, and that the *jeunesse dorée* of this country need the reproof and the warning, quite as much as that of France, is the belief of the translator.

JOHN STIRLING.

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TRANSLATED BY JOHN STIRLING.

CHAPTER I.

THE VARIÉTÉS.

AT nine o'clock "The Variétés" was still empty. Only a few persons were in the balcony and orchestra-stalls, and these were lost among the garnet-colored velvet chairs and the dim lights. Over the huge red curtain floated soft shadows, and not a sound came from behind its heavy folds. The foot-lights were turned down low—the desks of the musicians were unoccupied. From high up, however, in the third gallery, close to the roof, on which flying figures of unclad women and children were painted among clouds, to which the gas imparted a greenish tinge, came the sound of merry voices laughing and talking—the men and women both wearing the caps of the working classes.

The busy box-keeper, with tickets in her hand, appeared at intervals, showing a lady and gentleman to their places—the gentleman in evening dress, and the lady, slender and undulating in movement, looking slowly about the house as she seated herself.

Two young men appeared in the stalls. They stood with their backs to the stage.

"What did I tell you, Hector?" cried the elder—a tall fellow, with a slight, black moustache. "We have come too early. You might just as well have allowed me to finish my cigar."

A box-keeper passed by at this moment.

"Oh! Monsieur Fauchéry," she said, familiarly addressing the young man, "it will not begin for a full half hour."

"Then, why on earth do they advertise for nine o'clock?" asked Hector, whose thin face assumed an expression of intense annoyance. "This very morning Clarisse, who is in the piece, swore to me that the curtain would go up at nine, to the minute."

Fauchéry shrugged his shoulders, and muttered:

"If you derive your information from such sources, you had best look out; for Clarisse, my dear fellow, will make you see stars!"

They relapsed into silence, while they looked up and examined the dark boxes; but the green paper, with which they were lined, absorbed the little light there was. The baignoirs under the gallery were in perfect darkness. In the balcony-seats there was but one person—a stout lady leaning over the velvet-covered balustrade. The proscenium boxes on the right and left of the stage were vacant, their long-fringed lambrequins undisturbed.

The body of the house, decorated in white and gold, relieved by pale green, was filled, as it were, with a light mist emanating from the low-turned lights of the huge crystal chandelier.

"You succeeded in procuring your proscenium box for Lucy, then?" asked Hector, turning at last toward the stage.

Fauchéry glanced at the stage-box on the right as he answered:

"Yes; but it was not without an infinite deal of trouble. Oh! there is no danger of Lucy's coming too early—not she!"

He stifled a yawn, and then, after a brief silence, said:

"And you were never at 'a first night?'"

"No, never. I have only been three weeks in Paris."

"Well, you are certainly in luck, for 'The Blonde Venus' will be the event of the year. It has been the talk of the town for the last six months. Ah! my dear fellow, you never heard such music—music with such a swing to it. Bordenave, who knows what he is about, has been holding it back for the Exposition."

Hector listened religiously, and when his companion stopped to draw a long breath, he ventured to ask a question:

"And Nana—the new star who is to play Venus—do you know her?"

"Good heavens! Are you going to begin that?" cried Fauchéry, gesticulating wildly. "This whole day I have been deafened by this talk about Nana—Nana here and Nana there! I have seen twenty persons, and that is all I have heard. Do you suppose I know everybody in Paris? Nana is one of Bordenave's inventions, and, as such, ought to be something wonderful. That is all I can tell you."

After this explosion, he calmed down a little. But the emptiness of the house, the dim light of the chandelier, the opening and shutting of doors, and the lowered voices suggestive of a church, irritated him.

"No, no!" he said, suddenly. "I can't stand this, you know, and I am going out. Perhaps we can find Bordenave, and he will give us some details."

They found the vestibule gradually filling up. Through the three open doors all the busy life of the Boulevards and the dusk of the soft April evening could be seen. Carriages dashed up to the theatre, and the doors were slammed noisily. People entered by twos and threes, and after stopping at the desk, ascended the double staircase in the rear—the women very slowly, with a peculiar swaying movement.

The glare of the gas brought out on the white walls of the corridor, whose meagre decorations in the style of the Empire suggested the peristyle of a card-board temple, the enormous yellow bills, on which was Nana's name in huge black letters. Men were loitering in front of these bills, reading and discussing them, while they filled up the passage and the doorways. Near the office, a clumsily

built man with a large, smooth face, was replying with considerable roughness to some persons who were insisting on having seats.

"But I tell you it is impossible! There is not a seat in the house. Every one was taken two weeks ago!"

"That is Bordenave!" said Fauchéry, as he and Hector advanced.

But the Manager had seen them.

"You are a nice fellow!" he called out. "That is the way you write me a notice, is it? I opened the *Figaro* this morning—not a word—you had a good deal to say of the Japanese Embassy. Let me congratulate you on the freshness of your subject!"

"Come, now!" answered Fauchéry, "aren't you in too much of a hurry? I must see your Nana before I can write about her. Besides, I have made no promises!"

Then, to prevent further discussion, he presented his cousin, Monsieur Hector de la Faloise, a young man who had come to complete his education in Paris. The Manager weighed the youth at a glance, which Hector returned with some little emotion. This, then, was Bordenave, a showman of women, whom he treated like convicts, and whose brain was always smoking with some new money-making scheme; noisy, expectorating, a familiar cynic with the coarse wit of a police officer. Hector was anxious to make a good impression.

"Your theatre—" he began, in clear, musical tones.

Bordenave interrupted him quietly, and said, with the coolness of a man who prefers to call things by their right names,

"Why don't you call it my Seraglio?"

Fauchéry laughed approvingly but La Faloise was shocked to a degree. His meditated compliment was choked in his throat, and yet he endeavored to look amused.

The Manager rushed forward to shake hands with a dramatic critic whose columns had great influence, and, when he returned, La Faloise had recovered himself. He feared lest he should be regarded as a provincial if he seemed too much disturbed.

"They tell me," he began, wishing to say something, "that Nana has a delicious voice."

"She!" cried the Manager, with a shrug of the shoulders. "She has no voice whatever."

The young man hastily added:

"But, at all events, she is an excellent actress."

"She! A mere bundle of rags! She does not know what to do with her hands or her feet."

La Faloise colored. He could not understand, and he stammered out:

"On no account would I have missed this opening night at your theatre—"

"Call it my Seraglio," interrupted Bordenave again, with the cold persistency of a man who has made up his mind.

Meanwhile, Fauchéry had been calmly examining the women as they entered. He now came to his cousin's assistance, who he saw was doubtful, whether to laugh or be angry.

"Gratify Bordenave. Call his theatre just what he desires, my dear fellow, and, as for you," he continued, turning to Bordenave, "you need not be so absurd. If your Nana can't sing, and can't play, you will make a miss of it to-night."

"Make a miss of it, indeed!" angrily answered the Manager. "Is it necessary for a woman to know how to do either? Ah! my dear boy, you are too stupid. Nana has something besides these accomplishments, and something better than either or both. I have found this out, and if I have made a mistake you may call me a fool in future! You will see, yes, you will see, she has only to make her appearance, and the house will be in a frenzy of delight."

He lifted his great hands which trembled with enthusiasm, and then murmured to himself:

"Zounds! yes, she will be a success, no doubt of that. Such a complexion!"

Then, in answer to Fauchéry's questions, he condescended to give certain details with such coarseness of language that Hector did not know where to look.

The Manager said he had long known Nana, and wished to bring her out, and it so happened that he wanted a Venus. He never allowed a woman to hang on to him very long, he soon got rid of her, and, if she could please the public, they might have her. But he had had a terrible time

lately. This girl had revolutionized the whole establishment. Rose Mignon, his star, a fine actress and an adorable singer, had threatened him daily, and declared she would leave him in the lurch. She was furiously jealous of Nana already. And, when he prepared the large playbill, good heavens! what a row she had made.

Finally he hit on the expedient of printing the names of the two actresses in letters of equal size. He never allowed himself to be worried in this way very long. When one of these little women, Clarisse or Simonne, did not toe the mark, he either boxed her ears or gave her a kick. It was really the only way of getting on with such people. He dealt in them, and he knew their value to a sou.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, interrupting himself. "There comes Mignon with Steiner! They are always together. You know that Steiner begins to consider Rose a dead weight, so the husband sticks to him like a plaster lest he runs away!"

The gas-lamps above the door of the theatre lighted the whole sidewalk. Two young trees looked startlingly green, and a post was so brilliantly illuminated that the advertising bills posted upon it could be read across the street as clearly as if it had been daylight, while beyond, the dark moving masses in the Boulevards were in alternate light and shadow.

A crowd of men loitered outside the theatre to finish their cigars and chat under the gaslight, which gave a livid pallor to their faces, and threw their shadows, short and black, upon the asphalt pavement.

Mignon, a tall, stout fellow, with the square head of a village Hercules, shouldered his way through the crowd, dragging with him the Banker Steiner, a short, round-faced man, with a grayish beard and a big stomach.

"You will see," resumed Bordenave, as he beckoned to these two men, who came to him at once.

"Well!" said the Manager. "You saw her yesterday in my private office."

"Ah! That was she then!" exclaimed Steiner. "I thought so all the time, but as she only came in just as I was going out, I did not really get a glimpse of her."

Mignon listened with lowered eyelids, all the time ner-

vously twisting a large diamond on his little finger. He knew of course that they were talking of Nana. The Manager proceeded to give a description of his débutante, the Banker's eyes sparkled, but Mignon interfered.

"Come on, my dear fellow. Don't stay here to be bamboozled in this way. The public will soon decide on her merits, and you know that my wife expects you to join her in her box."

He tried to lead his friend away, but Steiner was obstinate and refused to move. The crowd about them became more compact. The buzz of voices became louder, and the name of Nana was repeated over and over again with a sing-song enunciation of its two syllables. The men standing in front of the posters read it thence; others, as they passed, uttered it interrogatively, while the women, smiling and uneasy, repeated it softly with an air of surprise. No one knew Nana. From whence had Nana fallen? And little jokes were passed about and little tales told. The very name sounded like a caress, and fell familiarly from the lips of every one. Its constant repetition amused the crowd and kept it in a good humor. A fever of curiosity took possession of everybody—that Parisian curiosity which is sometimes as violent as an attack of brain fever. Every one was eager to see Nana. One lady had the train of her dress torn, and a gentleman lost his hat.

"Ah! you ask me too much," cried Bordenave to twenty men who were besieging him with questions. "You will see her presently; but I must be off, for I am wanted."

He disappeared, radiant at having fired his public. Mignon shrugged his shoulders and reminded Steiner that Rose was expecting him. She wanted his opinion on her costume for the first act.

"Is not that Lucy getting out of her carriage?" asked La Faloise of Fauchéry.

It was in fact Lucy Stewart, a woman of about forty, small and ugly, a long neck, a thin, drawn face and thick lips, but so gay and charming that she pleased every one. She was accompanied by Caroline Héquet and her mother. Caroline was very beautiful, pure and cold in appearance; the mother very stately, and looking as if she were stuffed.

"Come with us," she said to Fauchéry; "I have kept a place for you."

"Not if I know it," he answered. "I want to sit where I can see something. I prefer a stall."

Lucy was vexed. She wondered if he were unwilling to be seen with her, but controlling herself, she added quickly:

"Why did you never tell me that you knew Nana?"

"Nana! I never saw her!"

"Is that true? I was told that you were intimately acquainted with her."

Fauchéry laughed, but Mignon made them a sign to be quiet, and when Lucy asked why, he pointed to a young fellow who had just passed, murmuring:

"Nana's especial friend!"

They all stared after the youth, who was certainly very good-looking; his name was Daguenet, and he had spent a fortune of three hundred thousand francs, and now dabbled in stocks to make a little money with which he could pay for an occasional bouquet and dinner.

Lucy thought to herself that his eyes were superb.

"Ah! there is Blanche!" she suddenly exclaimed. "It was she who told me that you knew Nana so well!"

Blanche de Sévry, a heavy blonde, whose pretty face was meaningless and pasty, arrived, accompanied by a slender, well-dressed man with an unmistakable air of distinction.

"Count Xavier de Vandeuvres," Fauchéry whispered.

The Count nodded carelessly to the Journalist, while a lively discussion took place between Lucy and Blanche. They quite blocked up the passage-way with their trains and flounces, one in pink and the other in blue, and the name of Nana fell from their lips so frequently that the crowd lingered to listen. The Count led Blanche on, but Nana's name did not cease to resound from the four corners of the vestibule in louder and more eager tones. Would the curtain never rise? The men pulled out their watches, late comers leaped from their carriages before they really drew up, and the passers-by slowly crossed the stream of light and stretched their necks to see what was going on in the theatre.

A street boy stopped whistling, and stood for a moment

before a play-bill. Then, in a voice husky with liquor, he began to sing, "Oh! Nana! oh! Nana!" and then reeled on his way, with his wooden shoes clattering on the pavement. People laughed, and several gentlemen took up the refrain, singing: "Oh! Nana! oh! Nana!" in subdued voices.

The heat was intense. A quarrel burst forth at the desk, and the cries of "Nana!" increased. One of those fits of brutal excitement common to crowds had taken possession of this mass of people.

Suddenly, above this uproar, the sound of a bell was heard; it was buzzed about—and the rumor extended to the Boulevard—that the curtain was about to rise; and there was more pushing and struggling; the employés of the theatre were at their wits' end. Steiner had not been to inspect the dress Rose was to wear. Mignon looked angry and uneasy. At the first tinkle of the bell, La Faloise pushed the crowd aside, dragging Fauchéry with him—fearing lest he should lose the overture.

Lucy Stewart was irritated by all these demonstrations of eagerness. The idea of being hustled about by these men in this way exasperated her. She wished to remain in the vestibule as long as possible, with Caroline Héquet and her mother. At last the way was clear. There was not a sound except from the Boulevard, which kept up its continuous roar.

"What utter nonsense!" said Lucy, as she ascended the stairs; "as if new pieces were necessarily good for anything!"

Fauchéry and La Faloise stood in their places, examining the house, which was now very brilliant. The crystal chandelier blazed with prismatic hues, and the light was reflected from the ceiling on the pit like a shower of gold. The velvet of the seats had a shining, watered effect, while the glitter of gold was softened by the decorations of pale green. The foot-lights blazed upon the purple and gold of the curtain, that offered a melancholy contrast to the poverty of the frame, which showed the stucco work under the worn and scratched paint.

It was already excessively warm. The musicians at their stands were tuning their instruments. The light

trills of the flute, the stifled sighs of the horn, the singing notes of the violin, were drowned by the increasing sound of voices.

All the spectators were talking together, and pushed and squeezed; the rush in the corridors was so great that it seemed as if the people were fairly fired through the doors.

The chairs were gradually filling; light toilettes here and there; a delicate profile crowned with braids of bejewelled hair, stood out against the garnet velvet. In a box a woman's rounded shoulder caught the light, while her face was in obscurity. Others fanned themselves slowly, watching the surging crowd, while a group of young men standing in the orchestra stalls looked all shirt bosom. They held their opera-glasses in their well-gloved hands, and wore hot-house flowers in their button-holes.

"The house is altogether too small," remarked La Faloise, "the balcony projects too far; the pit must be positively stifling."

Then, as Fauchéry did not pay any attention to what he was saying, he looked around in search of acquaintances. Mignon and Steiner sat side by side in a baignoire, leaning on the velvet balustrade. Blanche de Sévry appeared to be alone in a lower stage-box on the left. It was necessary to lean well forward to discover the Comte de Vandeuvres.

But La Faloise watched Daguenet with especial interest. The young man had an orchestra stall two rows further on. Next him was a school-boy, his childish eyes opened wide in surprise. Fauchéry smiled as he looked at him.

"Tell me," said La Faloise, suddenly, "who that lady is in the balcony. That one, I mean, who has a young girl in blue next her."

He directed his companion's eyes to a woman whose stout figure was tightly laced, and whose once blonde hair, now gray, was dyed yellow, and dressed in light, childish curls over her brow. Her face was coarsened and reddened by the immoderate use of paints and cosmetics.

"That is Gaga," said Fauchéry; and, as this name seemed to convey no information to his cousin, he added:

"You surely have heard of Gaga. She triumphed in the first years of Louis Philippe's reign. Now she is never seen without her daughter."

La Faloise had no eyes for the young girl. Gaga affected him strangely. He thought her still very handsome, but he dared not say so.

The leader of the orchestra lifted his bow, and the musicians struck the first note. People were still coming in, and the noise and bustle seemed never-ending. The special public, which are always faithful attendants at first representations, recognized each other with bows and smiles, and seemed perfectly at home.

All Paris was there—the Paris of letters, of finance and of pleasure, many journalists, some few authors and artists, sporting men and speculators, more women of the town than women of society—a house, in short, that was a most singular mixture of vice and virtue, where the same weariness and the same fever was inscribed on every face.

Fauchéry pointed out to his cousin three old officials, two women who adored their husbands, a magistrate who was famous for the severity of his sentences, a celebrated author, half-hidden behind a tall, handsome man, whose decorations had not prevented him from being summoned into Court very recently on some criminal charge.

He pointed out the boxes of the various newspapers and clubs, and then the dramatic critics, one thin and dried up, with thin and wicked-looking lips, another stout and good-natured-looking, who leaned over his companion, a young girl, with a kind, paternal air.

But Fauchéry's descriptions were abruptly closed on seeing La Faloise exchange a bow with some people in the box opposite. He seemed surprised.

"Ah! you know the Comte Muffat de Béville, then?"

"Oh, yes. I have known him for a long time. The Muffat estates are near our own. I stay there very often. The Count has his wife with him, and the old gentleman is her father, the Marquis de Chouard."

Delighted at his cousin's astonishment, and spurred on by his vanity, La Faloise went into further details: the Marquis was a member of the Cabinet, and the Count had just been made Chamberlain to the Empress. Fauchéry

took up his glass and examined the Countess, a black-eyed beauty with a dead-white skin.

"You must present me between the acts," he said at last. "I have already met the Count, but I should like to go to their Tuesdays."

An energetic "Hush!" was heard from the upper gallery. The overture had commenced, but people were still coming in. The doors of the boxes rattled as they were pushed open, and whole rows of persons were compelled to rise to allow late comers to get to their seats, and loud voices quarrelling outside were heard at intervals. And the buzz of conversation, like the noisy chattering of sparrows at sunset, never ceased. People were getting up and sitting down, and it seemed as if the confusion were never ending. The cry of "Down! Down!" came from obscure corners of the pit. Every one trembled with eagerness, for at last the famous Nana, of whom people had been talking for a week, was shortly to be seen. The suspense became almost intolerable, as did the heat and the glare.

By degrees the hum of conversation abated, with an occasional swell from time to time.

The orchestra played a lively waltz, whose rhythm sounded like a laugh, but there was a furious clapping of hands in the front row. The curtain rose slowly.

"Look!" said La Faloise, whose tongue still wagged. "There is a gentleman with Lucy," and he looked at the box in the front of which sat Lucy and Caroline, while a little back the dignified face of Caroline's mother was to be discerned, and also the profile of a handsome light-haired man, most irreproachably dressed.

Fauchéry turned his glasses upon the box.

"Oh, yes; it is Labordette," he answered, indifferently, as if the presence of that gentleman was the most natural as well as the most unimportant thing in the world.

Behind them some one said angrily, "Hush!" and they were driven to silence. Everybody was now in a state of breathless expectancy.

The scene of the first act of "The Blonde Venus" was laid in Olympus—a card-board Olympus, with clouds, and with a throne for Jupiter on the right.

Iris and Ganymede first appeared, surrounded by a

crowd of Celestial assistants, who sang a chorus as they arranged the seats for the Gods in Council. Again the bravos from the "*claque*" were heard, but the public as yet was not inclined to respond.

La Faloise, however, had clapped Clarisse Besnus, one of Bordenave's women, who took the part of Iris, in pale blue, with a scarf of the seven colors drawn around her form.

"You know that she has the greatest difficulty in the world to make those garments fit," he said in a whisper to Fauchéry. "I was told so this morning."

The ill-sustained composure of the house was here ruffled by the appearance of Rose Mignon as Diana. Although she had neither the face nor the figure for the part, for she was thin and dark, she was very charming, and seemed to enjoy the inconsistency of her appearance and the character she personated.

Her song on entering, with its stupid words, when she complained of Mars, was sang with an air of affected modesty which was so full of by-play and crisp insinuations, that the public warmed up. Her husband and Steiner laughed aloud as they sat side by side. And the whole house burst into applause when Prullière, that actor so beloved, showed himself as Mars in the uniform of a General, with a monstrous plume, and dragging a sword that reached to his shoulder.

He had had enough of Diana. She swore to watch him and be revenged.

This duo ended by droll roulades from Prullière in the voice of a young monkey. He was as absurd as a young and successful premier may dare to be, and elicited many laughs from among the women in the boxes.

Then the public were chilled again; the scenes which followed were dull in the extreme. Old Bosc as an imbecile Jupiter, his head crushed under an enormous crown, had a quarrel with Juno on account of her jealousy of their cook. A procession of the gods Neptune, Pluto, and all the others, fell on dull and indifferent eyes. The spectators were becoming very impatient, and looked about the house rather than upon the stage. Lucy laughed with Labordette; and the Comte de Vandeuvres emerged a little

from behind his companion's broad shoulders; while Fauchéry watched the Muffats from out the corner of his eye. The Count was very grave, as if he could not quite make out what all this meant, and the Countess wore a vague smile and seemed wrapped in a reverie. But suddenly the applause of the "claque" was heard with the regularity of a discharge of musketry, and every eye was riveted on the stage once more. Was it Nana at last? The Nana who had kept them so long waiting.

A deputation of mortals introduced by Ganymede and Iris, respectable Bourgeois, and deceived husbands, came to lay before Jupiter a complaint against Venus, who had inspired their wives with the wish to do them wrong. The chorus was very droll with its complaints and significant pauses. This was encored, of course. In the meantime, a vigorous search was instituted for Venus, when Vulcan arrived in a state of furious indignation, claiming his wife, who had left his bed and board the previous day and had not since been seen. The chorus repeated the melody which had already been applauded and claimed Vulcan as their leader. The part of Vulcan was played by Fontan, a comic actor of undoubted talent and originality, whose costume was that of a village blacksmith—his wig was red and his bare arms were tattooed with hearts pierced by arrows.

A woman was heard to say, "Good heavens! how ugly he is!" and every one laughed as they applauded.

The next scene seemed interminable. Would Jupiter never get all the gods together that he with their assistance might decide what reply to give to these deceived husbands? And no Nana yet! Did they mean to keep back Nana until the curtain fell?

Suspense as long as this irritated the public, and they began to complain audibly.

"This is pretty bad!" said Mignon, gayly, to Steiner. "I can't make out what they are about!"

At this moment the clouds parted at the back of the stage, and Venus appeared. Nana, very tall and very full for her eighteen years, in the white tunic of a goddess, and with her beautiful blonde hair floating over her shoulders, walked toward the foot-lights with calm self-possession,

smiling at the crowd before her. Her lips parted and she sang her aria.

"Lorsque Vénus rôde le Soir."

At the first sound people exchanged glances of wonder. Was this a jest on the part of Bordenave, or a wager? Never had so false a voice and so poor a method been heard. Her Manager had spoken truly when he said that Nana had no voice. Nor did she know how to stand or move on the stage. She managed her hands badly. She carried herself awkwardly. A faint but unmistakable sound of disapproval was heard from the pit, when a clear, crowing voice from the orchestra stalls said aloud in a tone of intense conviction:

"She is very chic!"

The whole house looked at the youth who had uttered these words. It was the handsome lad, the school-boy of whom we have spoken; his childish face all aglow with admiration of Nana. When he saw that he was the attraction of every eye he turned scarlet with shame at having unconsciously spoken so loudly. Daguenet, who sat next him, looked at him with a smile, and the audience laughed aloud and thought no more of the hiss, that had been on their lips, while the white-gloved youths, also carried away by Nana, applauded with vehemence.

"That is so!" they cried. "Bravo!"

Nana, seeing the audience laughing, laughed also, and this redoubled the gayety. The girl was very beautiful—of this there could be no doubt, and her laugh showed a charming dimple in her chin. She stood waiting all undisturbed, as easy as if she had been on the stage all her life, even had the air of admitting the public to her intimacy, and nodded as if to tell them confidentially that she very well knew herself to be without talent, but that after all it was of little consequence—she could do without it, and had something else, as Bordenave had sworn.

She made a little sign to the leader of the orchestra which signified "Go on, my good man," and began the second verse, with the same sharp metallic voice, but which at this precise moment happened to please her

audience. Nana's smile was still on her red lips and lighted her clear blue eyes.

At certain verses, which were a trifle broad in meaning, her pink nostrils dilated and the color rose to her cheeks. She was still awkward, and still ignorant of how to carry herself on the sloping stage; but she was none the less admired on that account. Every man in the house had his opera-glass levelled full upon her. As she finished a verse her voice failed her entirely, and she saw that she could not go on. Without being in the least disturbed, she gave a little jerk of her hip whose roundness was visible under her scanty tunic, threw back her head, and extended her arms. This brought down the house. Suddenly she turned and showed her magnificent hair which fell all over her person like the fleece of a wild beast—at this the audience again applauded.

The end of this act elicited less enthusiasm. Vulcan wished to box the ears of his wife; but the gods took council, and insisted that they had best continue their investigations on the earth, and compel the goddess to manage the wives of these irate husbands.

Diana then overheard some tender passages between Venus and Mars, and swore that she would not take her eyes from them once on the entire journey. There was also a scene where Love, acted by a little girl of twelve, answered to every question, "Yes, mamma," "No, mamma," in tearful tones and with her fingers in her eyes. Then Jupiter, with all the severity of an angry schoolmaster, shut Love into a dark closet, and bade him conjugate the verb, "*to love*," twenty times, which would give the husbands at least an opportunity to draw one long breath. The finale was a brilliant chorus; the curtain fell; the claque in vain tried to obtain an encore; everybody started to leave the house.

As the audience pushed their way through the rows of chairs they exchanged their impressions. One phrase was constantly heard: "It is simply idiotic!"

But the piece, after all, mattered little. Nana was the essential part. Fauchéry and La Faloise met Steiner and Mignon in the corridor. The crowd was enormous, and the corridor more like a gallery in a mine than anything

else. They stood for a moment at the foot of the stairs, protected by the railing. The spectators from the upper galleries came down with a great noise of heavy shoes, and a box-opener tried to prevent a chair on which she had piled coats and shawls from being swept away in the crowd.

"I know her!" cried Steiner, as soon as he saw Fauchéry. "I have certainly seen her somewhere. I feel convinced that it was at the Casino; and, more than that, I believe she was tipsy."

"I feel just as you do," said Fauchéry. "I have met her somewhere." He lowered his voice and added, "At the Tricou, I fancy."

"Upon my life! you saw her in a nice place, then!" returned Mignon, with an air of angry disgust. "It is simply disgusting to see the public welcome with open arms any creature that comes. Soon there will not be a decent woman left on the stage. I think I shall forbid Rose playing any more."

Fauchéry tried to repress a smile. Meanwhile, the heavily-shod crowd continued to pour down the stairs, and a little man in a cap said, in a drawling voice:

"Well! she isn't worth a row of pins as an actress, but she looks good enough to eat!"

In the corridor, two youths, with their hair exquisitely frizzed by hot irons and their coats of an immaculate fit, were quarrelling and disputing, but they ended with the mutual admission that her eyes were very beautiful.

La Faloise in his heart agreed with these several opinions; he only said, however, that she would do much better if she would cultivate her voice. At this Steiner seemed to awake with a start.

They could decide on nothing, he said, until the next act. Mignon said that the piece would never be played through—declared it would be hissed off the stage, and as Fauchéry and La Faloise turned away, he took Steiner's arm and said:

"Come and see my wife's costume for the second act; it is really superb."

Above, in the Foyer, three crystal chandeliers burned brilliantly. The two cousins, who had ascended the stairs, here hesitated for a moment. The glass door showed them

a mass of heads—two currents moving in opposite directions. They entered. Five or six groups of men were talking and gesticulating earnestly, while others were walking up and down between the marble columns crowned by urns. Women were seated on the red velvet benches, watching the crowd as it passed, with a weary air, as if exhausted by the intense heat. A tall blonde was laughing violently, while a gentleman leaned so closely over her that his breath moved the tiny curls on her forehead. At the buffet, men were taking some refreshment, and everywhere Nana's name was heard.

"We will go down again after the next act," said Fauchéry, "for the lack of ventilation here is fearful. Let us go out on the balcony."

La Faloise, who was studying the photographs of actresses which hung, alternately with mirrors, between the pillars, consented. The gaslights on the front of the theatre had been extinguished. It was dark, cool, and refreshing on the balcony, which appeared to be vacant with the exception of one solitary figure—that of a young man who stood in the shadow on the right. He was smoking a cigarette. Fauchéry recognized him, and went forward with outstretched hand.

"Ah! Daguenet," he said; "what on earth are you doing here? I never before knew you to leave your stall at a first representation."

"But I am smoking, as you see," answered Daguenet.

There was a long silence and a little awkwardness, for neither man wished to speak first of Nana. But suddenly Fauchéry said:

"And the débutante, what do you think of her? She is considerably pulled to pieces down-stairs."

"I dare say," murmured Daguenet, "by men on whom she has turned a cold shoulder."

This was all the criticism he offered on Nana's talent. He was excessively cautious and a little nervous, answering only in monosyllables.

La Faloise leaned over the parapet and looked down on the Boulevard. The windows of a Hotel and a Club opposite were brilliantly lighted, while a compact mass occupied the tables in the Café de Madrid. Notwithstanding

the lateness of the hour, the streets were crowded, and people were obliged to wait five minutes sometimes, before they could cross from one sidewalk to the other, so great was the throng of carriages.

"What a place this is!" said La Faloise, who had not yet ceased to be astonished at Paris.

A bell rang, and the Foyer was rapidly emptied. The curtain rose as they entered the door, and took their places with animated faces, much to the disgust of those of the audience who had remained in their seats.

La Faloise looked for Gaga, but to his astonishment beheld the tall fellow with light hair who, in the first act, had been with Lucy in her box, now seated by Gaga's side, talking with her familiarly.

"What was the name of that gentleman? You told me, but I have forgotten."

Fauchéry looked up.

"Ah! yes, to be sure—Labordette," he said at last, with the same careless air as before.

The setting of the second act was a surprise. It was a dance at a little well-known tavern, the *Boule Noire*, and Mardigras; the peasants were singing and keeping time with their heels. This scene was such a surprise that it was applauded.

It was here that the Gods and Goddesses, led astray by Iris, who claimed to know the earth, had come to pursue their investigations. They were disguised—Jupiter as Roi Dagobert, with his breeches wrong side out and a huge tin crown. Phœbus appeared as the Postillon de Lonjumeau, and Minerva as a Normande nurse. Shouts of laughter greeted Mars, who wore a preposterous costume, as an Admiral, but the mirth was redoubled when Neptune, dressed in a blouse and tall cap, with curls glued to his temples, dragged after him his slip-shod shoes, and said in an unctuous voice:

"There is nothing to be done about it. If a man is handsome, he must allow himself to be adored!"

This elicited "Ohs!" and "Ahs!" from the ladies, who held their fans in front of their faces. Lucy's amusement was so great and so apparent that her friend Caroline Hequet entreated her to be quiet.

From this moment the piece was saved and was even a great success. This Carnival of the Gods—Olympus dragged through the mud, religion and poetry alike scoffed at and derided—struck the public as extremely witty.

A fever of irreverence took possession of the audience. They tore down the Gods from their pedestals. Jupiter had a good head, Mars was insignificant. Royalty became a farce and the army a jest.

When Jupiter, carried away by the charms of a little laundress, broke into a wild cancan, Simonne, who played the part of the laundress, hit the nose of the God with her heel, calling him "My stout old man!" it was considered to be the height of wit.. While they danced, Phœbus paid for the hot wine that Minerva drank, and Neptune treated the women who crowded around him with cakes and delicacies.

The smallest double entendres were snatched at. Faint allusions became indelicacies, and inoffensive words were invested with meaning that had not been intended. It was long since the public had been so gratified and amused.

The action of the play went on. Vulcan, dressed in the latest style, only all in yellow, and with yellow gloves and a glass in his eye, was there in pursuit of Venus, who at last arrived, dressed as a fish-woman, with a handkerchief thrown over her head and her full round throat decked with huge gold ornaments. Nana was so white and so plump and so natural in this costume that she at once gained her audience. Rose Mignon, a delicious baby in long skirts and a wicker carriage, was nearly forgotten, although she sang adorably. The other, the tall girl with her arms akimbo, who clucked like a hen, was so full of life and animal spirits that the audience were fairly carried off their feet.

After this second act no exception was taken at anything Nana did. She was allowed to stand badly, to move badly, to sing false notes and forget her part. She had only to turn to the audience and smile, to be greeted with wild applause.

The peculiar movements of her hips seemed to kindle

the orchestra stalls, and their enthusiasm rose from gallery to gallery up to the very roof. If she had had any real talent she would have appeared less droll. But she was a woman, and that was enough. She seemed thoroughly at home in the little tavern, and she danced with her arms akimbo—a very Venus of the gutter. The music, too, was eminently fitted for her voice; it was a souvenir of the fairs at Saint Cloud, a mixture of clarionets and flutes.

There were two encores: the waltz of the overture—the waltz with the peculiar rhythm, to which the gods and goddesses danced off the stage—Juno, as a Farmer's wife, attacked Jupiter and his little laundress—Diana surprised Venus giving a rendezvous to Mars, and at once hurried to Vulcan and gave him the hour and the place. Vulcan called out in return:

"I have my plan."

The remainder of the act did not seem very clear—the investigation ended in a wild galop, after which, Jupiter, out of breath, and without a crown, declared that mortals, if they were women, were delightful, and that the men were the only ones in fault.

The curtain fell, and above the applause, rose cries for the actresses and actors, who appeared hand-in-hand—Nana and Rose Mignon in the centre, side by side, each making the lowest possible inclinations, and were greeted with tumultuous applause. Then the house slowly emptied itself.

"I must go and pay my respects to the Comtesse Muffat," said La Faloise.

"Precisely; and you will kindly present me," answered Fauchéry. "Let us go this way."

CHAPTER II.

THE LÔGE OF THE COUNTESS.

BUT it was not such an easy matter to reach the balcony boxes, as the crowd was almost impenetrable. It was necessary to move very slowly, and rely on one's elbows rather than on one's feet. Leaning against the wall under a gas-light, the critic was giving his opinion of the piece to an attentive circle; and his broad shoulders were so firmly braced against the yellow wall that they seemed almost to bury themselves in it.

People, as they passed, lingered and told their friends who he was. It was rumored that he had laughed during one act, but later he was more severe—called the representation idiotic—in the worst possible taste—and an offence to morality. Further on, the kindly-faced critic was apparently benevolently disposed, but his words had a sting in them, like milk turned sour. The name of Nana was on every lip. Comparisons were instituted between her and Rose Mignon. Several women, interspersed among the black-coated men—actresses who talked very loud—uttered eager praise of the débutante, looking hastily about them as they did so.

A red Moquette carpet deadened the sound of heels, and only the ring of voices was heard resounding from the low ceiling.

As Fauchéry glanced through the round lights cut in the doors of the boxes, he was accosted by the Count de Vandeuvres, who asked for whom he was looking, and when he understood that the two cousins wished to find the Muffats, he showed them No. 7, which he himself had just left.

Then drawing nearer the Journalist, he said:

"Tell me, is not this Nana she whom we saw one evening on the corner of La Rue de Provence?"

"You are right!" exclaimed Fauchéry. "I knew that I had seen her somewhere before!"

La Faloise presented his cousin to the Comte Muffat de Béville, whose manner was cool in the extreme. But on hearing Fauchéry's name, the Countess looked up quickly and complimented him on his articles in *Figaro* in a few well-turned phrases. She half-turned toward him as she spoke, with a graceful movement of her shoulders. They talked for a few moments, and the conversation fell upon the Exposition.

"It will certainly be very fine," said the Comte, whose square face and regular features preserved a certain official gravity. "I visited the Champ de Mars to-day, and I was filled with wonder."

"I am told, however, that they will not be ready in season," La Faloise observed.

But the Comte answered in his austere voice:

"They will be ready. The Emperor wishes it."

Fauchéry told gayly how he had been obliged to remain in the aquarium one day when he went down in search of facts for an article he had in hand. The Countess smiled. She looked from time to time down upon the house, raising an arm with its long white glove reaching to the elbow, and fanning herself slowly. The theatre was now nearly empty—a few men lingered in the stalls, and several women were receiving their friends much as if they were at home. There was an air of good society about all these people, whose low, well-bred voices scarcely rose above a whisper. About the doors a few men in evening dress lingered, to inspect the few women who remained seated.

"We shall hope to see you on Tuesday next," said the Countess to La Faloise.

And she extended her invitation also to Fauchéry, who thanked her with a low bow. The play was not alluded to, nor was the name of Nana pronounced. The Count's manner was so icy and dignified, that one might have supposed him to be officiating at some séance of the Corps Legislatif. He took occasion to say as if in apology for their presence that his father-in-law had an especial fondness for the theatre. The door of the box stood open, and the Marquis de Chouard, who had gone out to leave room for the visitors, stood tall and erect in spite of his years, with his gentle, pale face shaded by his broad-

brimmed hat, following with his dim eyes the women who passed.

As soon as the Countess had given her invitation, Fauchéry took leave, feeling that under the circumstances it would not be in good taste to discuss the play. La Faloise left the box last. He had just discovered opposite, the light-haired Labordette quietly installed in the box of the Comte de Vandeuvres, conversing intimately with Blanche de Sévry.

"It seems," he said, as he joined his cousin, "that this Labordette knows all these women. See him now with Blanche."

"Knows them all! Of course he does," answered Fauchéry. "Why should he not?"

The corridor was nearly empty. Fauchéry was going hastily down the stairs when he was called by Lucy Stewart. She was standing just outside the door of her box. The heat, she said, was intolerable, and she preferred the corridor, where, with Caroline Héquet and her mother, she ate pralines. A box-keeper was conversing with them in a maternal manner.

Lucy reproached the Journalist. He could go and pay his respects to other women, but did not come near her. Then, dropping the subject, she said lightly:

"Do you know, my dear, I think that Nana has really done very well!"

She wanted him to enter her box for the last act, but he escaped, promising to see her later, and he and La Faloise went outside to smoke a cigarette. A constant succession of men poured down the steps eager for fresh air.

In the meanwhile Mignon had dragged Steiner to the Café. Seeing Nana's success, he spoke of her enthusiastically, all the time watching the Banker from out the corner of his eye. He knew him—knew him well—three times he had assisted him to deceive Rose, and when the fleeting caprice was over, had carried him back to her, faithful and penitent. In the Café they found every table full, and men were standing about with their glasses of beer in their hands; the large mirrors reflected this mass of heads and increased the size of the narrow room with its three chandeliers and plush-covered sofas, and its winding staircase

draped with red. Steiner wanted a table at a window on the Boulevard. The doors had been taken away a little too early in the season and it was cold there. As Fauchéry and his cousin passed, the Banker called to them.

"Come and take a glass of beer with us," he said.

He himself, however, was absorbed with one idea; he wanted to throw a bouquet to Nana, and sent a garçon, whom he called Auguste, to execute his commission. Mignon, who heard all he said, surveyed him with such steady eyes, that the abashed Banker called the garçon back.

"Get two bouquets, Auguste, and give them to the box-keeper. One for each of the ladies, you understand."

At the other end of the room, with her head supported against the frame of a mirror, stood a girl who could not have been more than eighteen. Under the ripples of her fair hair were a pair of eyes soft as velvet and honest as the day. Her face was that of a Virgin in an old picture. She wore a dress of faded green silk, with a round hat the half of whose brim was gone. She was pale with cold.

"Look! there is Satin," murmured Fauchéry as he saw her.

La Faloise questioned him.

"Oh! she was nobody; no better than she should be, but she was bright and amusing to listen to." And the Journalist called to her, but Satin refused to obey his summons. Fauchéry proposed to return to the theatre; he and his cousin had swallowed their beer, and they were cold, but Mignon said there was no haste; it would take a full half hour to set this third act.

When he was alone with Steiner, he leaned both elbows on the table, looked the Banker full in the face, saying, as he did so:

"Very well, I will present you. You know, of course, that this is between ourselves; my wife need know nothing about it."

Fauchéry and La Faloise noticed, as they took their places, a very pretty woman in the second row of boxes, well and quietly dressed. She was accompanied by a solemn-looking man—a Chief of Bureau under the Minister of the Interior, whom La Faloise knew from having

met him at the Muffats'. Fauchéry said he believed this lady who was called Madame Robert to be eminently respectable. Daguenet smiled and nodded at them from his seat, and then leaning toward them said:

"Will they treat her ill, think you?"

He spoke of Nana. Now that she had succeeded, he no longer kept himself in the background; he basked in the corridors and there enjoyed her triumph. His friends signalled him gayly from afar off in congratulation. The school-boy at his side had not once left his seat; he was entirely absorbed by Nana—he took off and put on his gloves mechanically. At last he summoned courage to speak to his neighbor, who he was certain was acquainted with this goddess.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but this lady, who is playing—do you happen to know her?"

"Yes—a little—" murmured Daguenet in surprise, and with some hesitation.

"Then you know her address?"

This question came so abruptly and so strangely as addressed to him that Daguenet felt like slapping the lad's face.

"I do not," he answered, coldly, and turned his back.

The boy understood that he had been guilty of some discourtesy; he colored deeply and was mortified beyond expression.

The bell rang, and the box-keepers were busy restoring the coats and wraps to the owners which had been left in their charge. People were prompt in returning to their seats, so greatly had their curiosity been aroused.

At the rising of the curtain the setting of the stage was applauded. It represented a grotto of Mount Etna, hollowed out of a silver mine, and glittered as if the sides were made of crowns fresh from the mint; at the back blazed Vulcan's forge. Diana had just gotten rid of Vulcan when Venus arrived. A shiver ran through the audience. Was Venus clothed or not?

A transparent gauze enveloped her; her rounded shoulders, her full bust and swelling hips were scarcely con-

concealed. The gauze was like foam; it was Venus as she rose from the sea, veiled by the flowing ripples of her hair. There was no applause; the hands were all nerveless. No one smiled—every face was grave, and the men were very pale, with parched lips. A wind seemed to have passed over them, soft and gentle, but full of hidden danger. The childish good-nature of Nana's face had vanished; she wore a smile, but it was the enigmatical one of a destroyer of men.

Mars hastened to the rendezvous and found himself in the presence of the two goddesses. Then came a scene cleverly played by Pruillière, where he was cajoled by Diana and caressed by Venus, who was stimulated by the presence of her rival. A grand trio ended the scene, and it was then that a box-opener appeared in the loge of Lucy Stewart, and threw on the stage two huge bouquets of white lilacs.

Nana and Rose Mignon courtesied their thanks, while Pruillière picked up the two bouquets. Glances from the orchestra stalls were directed to the baignoire occupied by Steiner and Mignon. The Banker's face was deeply suffused, and he seemed to have considerable difficulty in swallowing.

Diana left in a rage. It required courage to place such a scene upon the stage. Nana had her arm around Pruilliére's neck, when Fontan, exaggerating the look of fury with which a man detects the flirtations of his wife, stole upon the stage. In his hand he held a huge steel net which he skilfully threw over the offenders. Venus and Mars were taken in the snare.

A murmur ran through the house. Every glass was riveted on Venus. Nana had conquered the public. Bordenave's estimate was correct—she had only to show herself, as he had said. Fauchéry looked at the school-boy in front of him, who had started from his chair, and then at the Comte de Vandeuvres, who was deadly pale, and at Steiner, whose face indicated incipient apoplexy.

Labordette looked like a horse-jockey lost in admiration of a perfect mare. Daguenet was radiant with joy. Fauchéry glanced at the Muffat loge. Behind the

Countess, pale and serious, stood the Count with parted lips and a face blotched with red, while near him in the shadow the dull eyes of the Marquis de Chouard were transformed into two phosphorescent orbs, like those of a cat, flecked with gold. And Nana stood calmly facing these fifteen hundred persons.

The piece ended. At Vulcan's triumphant summons all Olympus arrived and marched past the offenders with "Ohs!" and with "Ahs!" Jupiter said to Vulcan:

"I think you very inconsiderate in calling us to see this."

Iris again appeared, and the chorus which had previously met with such success was repeated. Jupiter was urged not to listen to her request, for they said it was better for men to be deceived and happy. This was the moral of the play.

Venus was released, after a solemn vote on the part of the Gods, and Vulcan obtained a divorce. Mars was reconciled with Diana, and Jupiter, in order to insure domestic peace, sent off his little laundress in a constellation. Love was released from confinement, and the curtain fell on the chorus, all kneeling and singing a hymn of gratitude to Venus, who stood smiling in her strange costume.

The authors of the play were called for, and then followed a shout for Nana.

The house was not fairly emptied when the lights in the parquette were extinguished; gray linen was thrown over the velvet seats and upon the gilding of the galleries, and this place, so full of life a moment before, suddenly fell into a dull lethargy; an odor of mould and dust crept up from the floor.

At the back of her box waiting until the crowd had dispersed stood the Countess Muffat, all wrapped in furs and looking down into the darkness.

The women who had charge of the cloaks and wraps had lost their heads; two steady compact lines were coming down the stair-cases. The Comte de Vandeuvres had Blanche de Sévry on his arm. Gaga and her daughter were momentarily embarrassed, but Labordette got a car-

riage for them, and gallantly placed them in it. Daguenet had vanished, while the school-boy, with his cheeks on fire, hastened round to the artists' door, but alas! he found the Passage au Panoramas bolted.

Satin accosted him, but he pushed her roughly aside and disappeared in the crowd.

Some of the spectators lingered to light their cigars, and walked off humming the air, "Lorsque Vénus rôde le Soir."

Satin went back to the Café, where Auguste allowed her to eat the sugar his customers had left.

Fauchéry had promised Lucy Stewart, who came with Caroline Héquet and her mother, to join them after the performance. They stood together in a corner of the vestibule laughing loudly just as the Muffat party passed with their cold and haughty air. Fauchéry had the good taste not to salute them. Bordenave called him aside and obtained a formal promise of a favorable criticism. The Manager was overjoyed and intoxicated with his success.

"Your play will run for two hundred nights," said La Faloise, courteously. "The whole of Paris will invade your theatre."

Bordenave angrily replied, as he glared at the men who were departing, each pervaded by the presence of Nana:

"Why the devil don't you call it my Seraglio?"

CHAPTER III.

MADAME LERAT APPEARS.

THE next morning at ten o'clock Nana was still asleep She occupied in the Boulevard Haussman the second floor of a large house, which the owner let to ladies, that they might dry his plaster and walls for him. A rich merchant from Moscow, who had come to Paris for a winter, had installed her in these rooms, and paid six months in advance.

The apartment was too large for her, and had never been completely furnished. Gilt consoles and chairs stood side by side with shabby gueridons and iron candlesticks, which were expected to pass for Florentine bronze.

A thousand trifles indicated that the girl had been deserted by her first lover, and that she had since fallen into various hands, and had had a hard struggle—debts and threats of expulsion.

Nana slept upon her face, with her bare arms clasping her pillow in which she buried her face, all white with sleep. The bed-room and dressing-room were all that were fully furnished. A streak of light came in under the curtains, and showed that the furniture was rosewood, covered with brocade, blue flowers on a gray ground. The curtains were the same.

Suddenly Nana awoke with a start, as if surprised at the emptiness and quiet of the room. She looked around her as if she expected to find some one somewhere about in the apartment. But not a sign of anybody was visible in any direction.

And with hesitating, sleepy fingers she touched the button of the electric bell at the head of her bed.

"Has he gone?" she asked, as her maid appeared.

"Yes, Madame, Monsieur Daguenet went about ten minutes ago. He said, that as you were so much fatigued, he would not disturb you. But he told me to say that he would be here to-morrow."

The woman, as she spoke, opened the shutters, and allowed the daylight to stream in. Zoé, the maid, was dark, and wore her hair closely dressed to her head. Her face was long, very pale, and full of lines; her nose broad, her lips full, and her eyes restless.

"To-morrow, to-morrow," repeated Nana, only half awake, "what day is to-morrow?"

"Oh, Madame, does not Monsieur Daguenet always come on Wednesdays?"

"Oh, to be sure, I remember; but everything is changed," and the girl sat up in the bed. "I wanted to tell him so this morning. He will certainly stumble on that Blackamoor and then there will be a nice excitement."

"Madame should have told me," murmured Zoé. "How could I know? If Madame changes her days, it would be better to tell me. Do you mean that the Miser is to come Tuesdays?"

It was by these names of Blackamoor and Miser that these women designated the two men by whom Nana was supported. One was a merchant in the Faubourg Saint Denis, a man of an economical turn of mind; the other called himself a Count, but his money was very irregular and had a most peculiar odor.

Daguenet watched for the departure of the merchant, who was obliged to go early to his business, from Zoé's kitchen window, and took his place, until ten o'clock, when he too was compelled to attend to his affairs. This arrangement Nana highly approved of, as it left the day free to her.

"I will write to him this afternoon!" she cried; "and if he should happen not to get my letter, but should come just the same, you must not let him in."

Zoé, all this time, was moving slowly about the room. She spoke of the great success of the previous evening. Madame had shown so much talent! she had sung so well. She wanted to congratulate Madame when she returned from the Theatre, but the old Miser was there; and how he had wearied Madame! But she could soon do without him now, thank Heaven!

Nana, with her elbow on the pillow, answered only with an occasional nod of the head. Her solitary garment had slipped off her shoulders, and her hair was loosened.

"Yes, I suppose so," she said, slowly; "but what am I to do now? for I expect all sorts of disagreeable things to-day. Has the concierge been up this morning?"

Then the mistress and maid had a long and earnest conversation. Nana owed three months' rent and the Proprietor talked of seizing her effects. Then there were a host of other creditors: a bill at a livery stable, at the linen mercer's and dress-maker's, and several more which came regularly, and were placed on a table in the ante-room. The coal merchant was especially obnoxious, for he made a great noise on the stairs.

But Nana's greatest anxiety was in regard to her little Louis, who was born when she was but seventeen, and whom she had confided to the care of a nurse in a village in the neighborhood of Rambouillet. This woman now demanded three hundred francs for her care of the child. Nana had, since her last visit to her boy, been seized with a wonderful gush of maternal affection, and was wild to take her boy from the care of this woman and place him with her aunt, Madame Lerat, at Batignolles, where she could see him as often as she pleased.

"I need at least five thousand francs," she said, after she had added up the various sums again and again.

And as her maid continued to urge her to confide all her anxieties to "the old Miser," she exclaimed, pettishly:

"But I have already done so, and he told me that I had no method, and that his notes were coming due, and moreover, that he never should exceed his thousand francs per month. The Blackamoor is high and dry, and I believe has lost every sou at cards. As to poor Mimi, he would like to find somebody to lend him some money, for he is in a very bad way—a bad stroke of luck has cleaned him out, and he can only bring me flowers."

She was speaking of Daguenet. In the recklessness of her first awaking, she had no secrets from Zoé, who, being quite accustomed to these confidences, received them with respectful sympathy. As Madame condescended to talk of her affairs to her, she, of course, would say just what she thought.

She loved Madame, and had left Madame Blanche for her; and Heaven knew how thankful Madame Blanche

would be to have her back again. There were plenty of places she could have, of course; but she preferred to stay with Madame, even if she were poor, for she had faith in Madame's future. But if Madame would only take her advice, it would be better, for Madame had no experience, and, of course, must make mistakes sometimes. She understood Monsieur Bordenave, but she had best keep her eyes open and choose well, for men only thought of amusing themselves. If Madame were wise now, she could, with one word, find means to silence her creditors, relieve herself of all embarrassments, and have all the money she wanted.

"But all that does not give me three hundred francs just now," repeated Nana, burying her fingers in the masses of hair which she had loosely knotted at the back of her head.

"I must have three hundred francs—this very day—this very minute. It is very stupid of you," continued Nana, "not to know any one who will give you three hundred francs."

She wanted to send Madame Lerat, whom she was momentarily expecting, at once to Rambouillet. This capricious fancy entirely marred the triumph of the previous evening. Among all those men who had applauded her so eagerly, was there not one who would give her fifteen Louis? How unhappy she was! And she began to tell her maid about her dear little boy, whose eyes were so blue, and who said "Mamma" in such a funny way that she nearly died of laughing.

At this moment the door-bell rang violently.

Zoé ran to open it, and coming back, said, in a confidential whisper:

"It is a woman."

She had seen this woman a dozen times, but she affected not to know her, and to be entirely ignorant of her relations with ladies who were in pecuniary difficulties.

"She told me her name—Madame Tricon."

"La Tricon!" cried Nana. "Good! I had forgotten all about her. Show her in."

Zoé introduced an elderly lady, tall, wearing English curls, and with the air of a Countess who is calling upon her

attorney. This woman had a way of disappearing noiselessly, with the supple movement of a snake, whenever a man entered the room. Her visits, however, were never long. She rarely seated herself, and had time only for a brief exchange of words.

"I have some one for you to-day. Will you agree?"

"Yes. How much?"

"Four hundred."

"And at what hour?"

"At three o'clock. It is a settled matter, then?"

"Yes, entirely so."

La Tricon then spoke of the dry weather, which made it so agreeable to walk. She had five or six persons yet to see, and she took out a note-book, and went out of the room as she looked it over.

When Nana was alone, she breathed a sigh of relief. She shivered slightly, and buried herself once more among her pillows with the indolent delight of a chilly cat. By degrees, her eyes closed, and she smiled at the thought of dressing her little Louis prettily. She would take him the next day and buy him some new clothes. This idea was mingled in the sleep in which she fell, with the haunting dreams of the night—dreams in which she heard wild huzzas and hoarse shouts of applause.

At eleven o'clock Zoé showed Madame Lerat into the room. Nana was still asleep, but awoke at the sound of the opening door, and exclaimed:

"Ah! you have come. Will you go to Rambouillet to-day?"

"I came for that purpose," answered the aunt. "There is a train at twenty minutes past twelve. I shall have time to take that."

"No, I shall not have the money until the afternoon," replied Nana, as she indulged in a long stretch. "You will breakfast with me, and then we will see what we can do."

Zoé brought a dressing-gown.

"Madame," she said, respectfully, "the hair-dresser is here."

But Nana did not choose to go into her dressing-room. She called out to the man:

"Come in, Francis."

A man of extremely good appearance entered the room with a low bow, just as Nana threw off the coverlid and put her feet on the floor. She was in no haste to put her arms in the sleeves of the dressing-gown which Zoé held up for her. And Francis, quite unabashed, waited for her to take the chair in front of the toilette-table.

As he passed the comb through her hair he said:

"Has Madame seen the Journals? There is an excellent critique in the *Figaro*."

He took the paper from his pocket, and Madame Lerat putting on her spectacles went to the window, and standing there read it aloud. She stood very erect, with the air of a soldier. It was a screed of Fauchéry's, written on his return from the theatre, two adulatory columns of clever hatefulness for the artist, and of brutal admiration for the woman.

"It is excellent," repeated Francis.

Nana did not care a sou that her voice was laughed at. This Fauchéry was very nice, she said.

Madame Lerat having read the article once more, said abruptly that men had the very deuce in their wrists, and refused to explain herself further, being quite content with this allusion which no one but herself understood.

As Francis by this time had finished dressing Nana's hair, he retired with a bow, saying:

"I will keep an eye on the evening papers. I shall come as usual, I suppose? At half-past five?"

"Bring me a pot of pomade and a pound of pralines, my good Boissier," cried Nana across the room, just as he went out of the door.

Then the two women being left alone remembered that they had not yet kissed each other, which they proceeded to do. The article had made them very amiable. Nana until she read it, had been indifferent to her triumph, but now she began to realize it. Rose Mignon, she thought, must have had rather a dismal morning. Madame Lerat had not been at the theatre, because she said such excitement made her sick at her stomach, so Nana gave her a description of the evening, and intoxicated by her own words, ended by believing that all Paris participated in her triumph. Then interrupting herself, she asked with a laugh what they

would have said to all this when she lived in La Rue de la Geulle d'or. Madame Lerat nodded—of course no one at that time had any idea of the future that lay before the girl, and then she took up the discourse, called Nana "My dear" and "My daughter." Had she not been in fact a second mother to her, since the real one had gone to join her papa and her grandmother. Nana was quite touched and on the point of weeping. But Madame Lerat went on to say that the Past was the Past, and a wretched Past it was too, and it was not worth while to stir it up. She had for a long time ceased to have any intercourse with her niece, because some of the family had accused her of leading the girl astray. As if that were a possible thing! Thank God she had always lived properly, the result of which was that she had now a good home, and a good position. Honesty and hard work were the best things for women.

"Who was the father of this baby?" she said, interrupting herself abruptly, with her eyes filled with eager curiosity.

Nana, taken by surprise, hesitated a moment.

"A gentleman," she answered.

"Is that so?" replied the aunt. "It was said, you know, that he was a mason who beat you nearly to death. Come now, you might tell me: you know I am discretion itself, and I will take as much care of the boy as if he were the son of a Prince."

Madame Lerat had abandoned her trade as a flower maker, and lived on her income from her well-invested savings. Nana promised to give her a pretty little apartment, and allow her a hundred francs monthly. At these words the aunt lost her head entirely, and the two women kissed again. But Nana in the midst of her gay description of her little Louis, became suddenly very gloomy.

"It is too bad," she said, "but I must go out at three."

Madame Lerat was on the point of asking where she was going, but she looked at her niece and was silent. At that moment Zoé came to say that breakfast was served. They entered the dining-room, where they found an elderly lady already seated at the table. She had not removed her hat, and was dressed in some dark undecided color, between puce and *caca d'or*.

Nana showed no astonishment at seeing her guest. She simply asked why she had not come directly to her chamber.

"I heard voices," said the old lady, "and concluded that you had visitors."

Madame Maloir had a most respectable air, and excellent manners. She played the part of companion to Nana, and accompanied her when she went out. The presence of Madame Lerat seemed to make her uneasy, but when she discovered her to be an aunt, she looked at her with a gentle smile. Nana, saying that she was starving, pounced on the radishes which she crunched down without bread.

Madame Lerat becoming all at once very ceremonious, and wishing to indicate her fastidiousness, declined the radishes—they were very indigestible. But the young woman said they were good all the same, and as for herself she could digest shoe leather.

When Zoé brought in the cutlets, she disdained the meat and contented herself with picking a bone. All at once she began to examine the hat of her elderly friend.

"Is not that the new hat that I gave you?" she asked.

"Yes; I altered it a little," answered Madame Maloir, with her mouth full.

The hat was extravagant in style, very flaring and built up high with plumes. Madame Maloir had a strange fancy for making over all her hats. She alone knew what she did to them, but she contrived to ruin all she touched. Nana, who had just purchased this hat, that she might not be ashamed of her when they went out together, was much vexed.

"For Heaven's sake, take it off!" she cried.

"No, thanks," answered the old lady, with austere dignity; "it does not disturb me. I can eat just as well with it on."

After the cutlets came half a cold chicken and some cauliflower. But Nana turned over everything in rather a supercilious way, and ended by leaving it on her plate untouched. She ended her breakfast with some sweetmeats. She had the tastes of a parroquet.

Zoé did not remove the plates when she brought in coffee. The ladies simply pushed them aside. They still

talked of the previous evening. Nana rolled some cigarettes, which she smoked as she leaned back in her chair. Madame Lerat and Madame Maloir relaxed from their reserve and found themselves quite sympathetic. And as Zoé was still in the room leaning against the buffet, they began to question her in regard to her history.

She at once said she was the daughter of a nurse at Bercy who had met with many misfortunes. She herself had gone out to service, first to a dentist, and then she enumerated with some pride the ladies whom she had subsequently served as femme de chambre. Zoé grew quite important as she talked, and spoke of these as persons whom she had entirely managed. Certainly, more than one of them would have come to grief but for her. Now there was Madame Blanche. She had a friend with her one day, when her husband unexpectedly arrived. "And what did I do?" continued Zoé. "I fell purposely as I crossed the room, and pretended to be so faint that my master flew to the kitchen for a glass of water, and while he was gone the friend escaped!"

"You see what a treasure she is!" said Nana, laughing and blowing the smoke of her cigarette in tiny rings.

She listened to Zoé with a certain tender interest—with a sort of submissive admiration. This excessively ugly woman seemed to feel a thorough contempt for beauty, and shrugged her shoulders as she spoke of the careless prodigality of her mistresses, and of their stupidity, by which they ruined their good fortune.

"I, too, have had many misfortunes," began Madame Lerat, and drawing closer to Madame Maloir, she began to talk to her in a low, confidential voice. But Madame Maloir drank in the secrets of Madame Lerat, as she did those of other people, without imparting any of her own in return. It was said that she lived in a mysterious boarding-house, in a room to which no human being was ever admitted. The only thing by which she was ever excited, and which rendered her talkative, was her belief in somnambulism. She knew a somnambulist, she said, who cured every illness, provided she could touch the hair of the sick person. Madame Lerat having spoken of a rheumatic pain in her shoulders, by which she had been troubled for

more than a week, was induced to promise that she would consult the somnambulist.

Suddenly Nana exclaimed:

"Aunt, pray let those knives alone. You know that it always disturbs me!"

Without knowing what she was doing, Madame Lerat had placed two knives in such a way on the table, as she was playing with them, that they formed a cross. Generally speaking, Nana denied being in the least superstitious. She cared nothing for the salt being spilled, and she never paid any attention to Friday, but knives were too much for her. They never lied. Something disagreeable was certainly about to happen. She fidgeted a little, gave a light yawn, and then with an air of profound weariness, murmured:

"It is two o'clock already, and I must go out. It is too utterly stupid."

The two elder women looked at each other and then at her, and the three nodded solemnly, without speaking one word.

Nana lighted another cigarette, and sank back in her chair, while Madame Lerat and Madame Maloir closed their lips tightly with discreet philosophy.

"While you are gone we will have a game of bezique," said Madame Maloir, after a brief silence. "You play bezique, I suppose?"

Yes, Madame Lerat played it, and to perfection. It was not worth while to summon Zoé, who had disappeared. A corner of the table would do, and they turned the table-cloth over the soiled plates. But, as Madame Maloir opened the drawer of the buffet where the cards were kept, Nana said before she began her game, that she should like her to write a letter for her. She disliked herself to write, for she was by no means sure of her orthography, while her friend had an especial gift in such matters.

Nana ran to get some paper from her room. A three-sou ink-bottle was on the mantle with a mouldy pen standing in it. The letter was to Daguenet. Madame Maloir began it with "My best beloved," and told him not to come the next day because "he must not," and wound up by saying that "far or near, at all times and seasons, she was with him in spirit."

"And I think I had best add 'a thousand kisses,'" murmured Madame Maloir.

Madame Lerat nodded approval of each phrase. Her eyes flashed. She was always charmed when she was mixed up in any love-affair. She wished to add her mite, so she said, in a little cooing tone:

"A thousand kisses on your beautiful eyes."

"That is it! A thousand kisses on your beautiful eyes," repeated Nana, while the two old women smiled with a beatific expression.

Zoé was rung for that she might give this letter to a commissionaire. At the same moment a servant from the Theatre arrived, bringing Madame a notice, which should have been sent in the morning. Nana ordered the man to be shown in, and gave him the letter for Daguenet, telling him to deliver it on his way back. Then she asked him a few questions.

Oh! yes, Monsieur Bordenave was extremely pleased; every seat was sold for the next eight days, and Madame could have no idea of the number of persons who had asked for her address that morning. When this man was gone, Nana said that she should be out for not more than an hour at the most, and, if visitors came, they could wait. As she said this the bell rang furiously. It was a creditor, the man of the livery stable; he was installed on the bench in the ante-room, where he could twirl his thumbs until evening, if he pleased.

"Well! I must go," said Nana, lazily, with another yawn and stretch. "I ought to have started long ago."

But still she did not move. She followed her aunt's play, and sat with her chin on her hand, absorbed in the game, but she started when she heard the clock strike three.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed.

Then Madame Maloir, who was dealing the cards, said, gently:

"My dear, you ought to go instantly."

"Be quick," said Madame Lerat; "for I can take the four-thirty train if you are here with the money at four o'clock."

"I shall not be later than that," murmured Nana.

In ten minutes more, Zoé had fastened her dress and assisted her in putting on her hat. She did not care how she was dressed. As she was about to leave, there was another ring. This time it was the man with her coal bill. Ah! well, he could keep the carriage man company. These people were certainly great nuisances, and, to avoid a scene, Nana passed through the kitchen, and down the servants' stairs.

"When a woman is a good mother, all her short-comings in other respects must be forgiven," said Madame Maloir, sententiously, when she found herself alone with Madame Lerat.

"Eighty—" answered that lady, absorbed in her game.

And the two women hardly spoke another word. The table had not been put in order; the room was filled with the smell of the breakfast and the odor of the cigarettes smoked by Nana. Twenty minutes and more elapsed when another appeal at the bell was heard. Zoé hastily entered and accosted them as if they were her especial comrades.

"Come, now! there is the bell again; you can't stay here. If all the world are coming, I shall want this room, too. Be off with you!"

Madame Maloir wished to finish her game, but, when Zoé pretended that she was going to take away the cards, she began to pick them up herself in such a way that the game could be continued in the next room; while Madame Lerat took the bottle of cognac, the sugar, and the glasses, and the two women established themselves in the kitchen, at one end of the table, between the towels which were drying and the dish-pan still full of greasy water.

When Zoé came back, she found them again utterly absorbed; but presently, as Madame Lerat dealt the cards, she asked who it was that had rung.

"Oh! nobody of any consequence," answered Zoé. "A little fellow—a boy. I wanted to send him away; but he was so handsome and so fresh, with his smooth, girlish face and blue eyes, that I told him to wait. He had an enormous bouquet, which he would not let me take. Bless my heart! he ought to be with his mother, or at school!"

Madame Lerat went for a carafe of water, for the liqueur she had drank had made her thirsty. Zoé said that her mouth was as bitter as gall, and all parched.

"And you put him where?" interrupted Madame Maloir.

"Oh! I put him in the little room at the back—the one, you know, that is not furnished. There is only a trunk and a chair there."

Again the bell.

"Good heavens! could a woman have no peace at all!" Zoé exclaimed, as she hurried out; and when she returned, she said, in reply to Madame Maloir's look of inquiry:

"Only a bouquet."

The bell rang several times while Zoé was clearing the table, bringing out the dishes one by one, but each time she said in a tone of profound contempt:

"Nothing but a bouquet."

Meanwhile, the ladies were much amused at hearing the rage of the creditors in the ante-room as the flowers poured in. It was abominable that they should cost so much, and yet be worth not ten sous to them.

"As for me," murmured Madame Maloir, "I should be quite contented if I could have the money which the men in Paris spend in one day for flowers."

"Ah! my dear, you are easily pleased then," answered Madame Lerat. "I should like something more than that."

It was now ten minutes of four. Zoé wondered audibly what kept Madame. Generally, when Madame went out in the afternoon, she went like lightning. But Madame Maloir said that people could not always do just as they wished.

"There were certainly many difficulties in life!" said Madame Lerat. "The only thing to do was to wait. If her niece were detained, it was not her fault; and, after all, it was not so very hard this waiting. The kitchen was most comfortable;" and as she had no hearts, Madame Lerat played a spade.

The bell rang once more, and Zoé left the kitchen. This time she did not return very quickly, and when she came back she was radiant.

"My dears," she said, "guess who is here?—that big fellow, Steiner. Oh! I have often seen him when I lived with Madame Blanche. I put him in the small salon."

Then Madame Maloir spoke to Madame Lerat of the Banker. This lady knew none of these men, and she wondered if he intended to desert Rose Mignon. Zoé shook her head with a knowing air. But again she was called upon to open the door.

"It is the Blackamoor," said Zoé, when she came back. "I told him Madame was out, but he insisted on coming in. And where do you think he has installed himself? You know we did not expect him until this evening."

"In the bed-room, is he?" asked Madame Lerat, eagerly.

"Precisely. He went there at once. I could not stop him. Fortunately, the dining-room and the salon are left to me. But I really think that Madame might come home, under the circumstances."

At quarter-past four Nana had not appeared. What on earth could she be doing? There was no sense in such conduct. Two more bouquets had come, and Zoé looked to see if there was no coffee left. She found there was, and the three finished the coffee, with the hope that it would wake them up a little.

Suddenly Madame Maloir exclaimed:

"I have five hundred—the ace makes it!"

"Do be quiet," said Zoé, angrily. "What on earth will all these men think?" and in the silence that followed this outbreak, the sound of quick steps running up the servants' stairs was heard. Nana at last!

Before she opened the door, they heard her quick pants. She entered abruptly with a bright color on her cheeks. Her train, which she had not taken the trouble to lift, swept the stairs, and the flounces had dipped into some dirty puddle on the lower landing, for Zoé was not over neat in her service.

"Do you know," said Madame Lerat, in a vexed tone, "that any number of people are waiting for you?"

"Really, Madame is not reasonable," added Zoé.

Nana, already out of temper, was exasperated by these reproaches. It was a little too much to be received in this way, after the annoyance she had just undergone.

"Let me alone, all of you!" she exclaimed.

"Hush! Madame, there are visitors in the next room," said Zoé.

Nana lowered her voice.

"If you think that I have been amused you are greatly mistaken. I thought that I should never get back, and not a fiacre to be found. Fortunately I did not have far to go, and I fairly ran home."

"You have the money?" asked the aunt.

"What a question!" answered Nana.

She dropped into a chair near the furnace, weary with the haste she had made, and without waiting to get her breath, she drew from her bosom an envelope, in which were four notes of an hundred francs each.

These notes were to be easily seen through a large tear, which she had roughly made to assure herself of the contents. The three women around her looked fixedly at this envelope: a thick paper, tumbled and stained, which she held in her small, gloved hands. It was now too late for Madame Lerat's train, but she would go to-morrow to Rambouillet. Nana began to give some explicit directions to her aunt.

"Madame, there are people waiting for you," repeated Zoé.

Then Nana lost her temper once more.

"Let them wait," she said, "or come again when she was not so busy." And as her aunt stretched out her hand for the money—"No, you can't have it all!" she cried. "Three hundred for the nurse; fifty for your journey—three hundred and fifty that makes. Leave fifty for me."

The great difficulty now was to find some change. There was not ten francs in the house. No one appealed to Madam Maloir—who listened indifferently—for she was never known to have more than an omnibus fare in her purse. But Zoé went off, saying she would look in her trunk, and returned with one hundred francs in small silver. Madame Lerat left at once, saying she would bring Louis in the morning.

"You say there are people here?" asked Nana, sitting still as she spoke.

"Yes, Madame; three persons."

And she named the Banker first. Nana drew down her mouth. Did this Steiner think that she would allow him to bore her to death, merely because he had thrown her a bouquet the night before!

"Besides," she continued, "I have had quite enough for to-day. I will not see a soul. Go and tell them that I am not coming home to-night."

"Madame will reflect a moment. Madame will receive Monsieur Steiner," said Zoé, without moving, and with a sorrowful, grave air, as if shocked at seeing her mistress guilty of such a piece of folly.

Then she spoke of the Blackamoor, who certainly must find the time pass rather heavily, shut up in the bedroom. At the name of Valoque, Nana became absolutely furious. She would not see him, no matter how long he waited, or where he waited. It was bad enough to have him in the evening, and if he took to coming in the afternoon she positively would not stand it.

"Show them the door, every one of them," she insisted; "and I will have a game of cards with Madame Maloir."

While she was speaking the door-bell rang: this was too much. She forbade the servants opening it; but Zoé paid not the least attention to these commands, and calmly left the kitchen; and when she returned with two cards in her hand she said, with an air of authority:

"I told them that Madame would see them. These gentlemen are in the salon."

Nana started up in a fury. But the names of the Marquis de Chouard, and of the Comte Muffat De Béville, which she read on the cards, calmed her at once.

"Who are these people?" she asked. "Do you know them?"

"I know the old man," answered Zoé, compressing her lips in a discreet sort of way.

And as her mistress continued to question her by her eyes, she added:

"At least I have seen him somewhere."

Nana seemed to arrive at a sudden decision. She felt that she must at least receive these two, and she left the kitchen with regret—that warm refuge where she could talk

or not as she pleased, where the smell of the coffee that was warming in the pot was grateful to her nostrils.

She left Madame Maloir behind her, and hurried to her dressing-room, where Zoé assisted her in putting on a peignoir, Nana all the time sullenly growling at men in particular, and men in general.

These rough words disturbed the femme de chambre, because she saw that her mistress would not easily regain her equanimity. She ventured to beg Madame once more to calm herself.

Suddenly she assumed her princess air, and was about to sail into the salon when Zoé stopped her, and herself showed into the dressing-room the Marquis de Chouard and the Comte Muffat.

This was a better way of doing things.

The two men bowed profoundly, and in obedience to a little sign from her, seated themselves. Lace curtains shaded the windows of this dressing-room, which was the most elegant of the suite, furnished and hung in light colors—a very large dressing-table of marble, an inlaid Psyche, a chaise longue and chairs of blue satin. On the toilette-table the bouquets were piled, roses, lilacs and hyacinths filling the air with fragrance, which did not overpower, however, the odor of patchouli, and as Nana came toward her visitors with her loose peignoir and her laces half-fastened, she seemed to have been interrupted at her toilette.

"Madame," said the Comte Muffat, gravely, "you will, I trust, excuse us for having, as it were, forced your doors. We have come on a begging errand. This gentleman and myself are members of the Charitable Association of this district."

The Marquis de Chouard hastened to add, gallantly:

"When we learned that a great artist inhabited this house, we determined to present our poor to her more especially. Talent is always accompanied by heart."

Nana affected great modesty. She answered only with a little motion of the head, and wondered whether it were the old man who had brought the other. The expression of his eyes was certainly very peculiar. The other, however, was equally singular. Why did he not come alone?

The truth was, she thought, that when the concierge had mentioned his name, they pushed on each for himself.

"Certainly," she murmured, courteously; "you were quite right in asking to see me."

The door-bell rang. Another visit, and that Zoé had no mercy upon her. The two men started.

"I am very happy," she said, "in being able to give—"

She was, in fact, greatly flattered.

"Ah! Madame," resumed the Marquis, "if you had any idea of the misery about you! Our district contains more than three thousand poor, and yet it is one of the wealthiest. You cannot imagine the distress we are daily called upon to witness—children without bread, women prostrated by illness—dying of cold!"

"Poor things!" cried Nana, greatly touched.

She was as easily moved to pity as are most women of her class. Tears filled her beautiful eyes. She forgot to be artificial, and leaned earnestly forward. Her peignoir showed her white, rounded throat, and clung closely to her form. The Marquis caught his breath, and the Comte de Muffat, who was about to speak, passed his hand over his brow hastily. It was very warm in the room—the warmth of a hot-house laden with the odor of fading flowers.

"One would like to be very rich at these times!" continued Nana, eagerly; "but each must do what she can. But you may be assured, gentlemen, that had I known—"

She was on the point of making a great mistake in her eagerness, but she did not finish her phrase. She hesitated again, for she could not remember where she had put the fifty francs when she took off her dress. At last she recalled the place on the corner of her toilette-table under a pomatum-pot, which she turned over. As she took up the money the bell was again heard. Would people never have done coming, and did Zoé intend to let in the whole world? The two gentlemen rose, and the Marquis seemed to recognize the hand that pulled the bell. Muffat looked at him, and the two became stiff and cold in their air and demeanor.

"I am sorry, gentlemen," said Nana, as she extended her ten pieces of silver, "to burthen you in this way, but you know it is for the poor."

The little dimple in her chin was very lovely as she

smiled, with her best air of hearty good-nature. The Comte was the most alert in taking the silver from her hand; but one piece remained, and he was compelled in taking it, to touch the smooth, white skin.

She laughed.

"This is all I can do to-day, gentlemen," she said. 'Another time hope for better things."

They had no pretext for lingering; they therefore bowed and retreated toward the door. But as they were going out they heard the bell ring once more. The Marquis could not conceal a pale smile, while on the Comte's brow a shadow fell. Nana detained them a moment that Zoé might find another corner. She did not like people to meet on her stairs.

When she saw that the salon was empty, she asked herself if Zoé had shut up the strangers in her wardrobe.

"*Au revoir*, gentlemen!" she said, as she stood on the threshold of the salon, all smiles and gayety, and they could not tell whether these smiles were addressed exclusively to them or to the Members of the Benevolent Society which they represented. The Comte Muffat bowed low, but in spite of his knowledge of the world, and experience, he was greatly disturbed by this interview, in this pretty dressing-room with its flowers and perfumes.

When Nana returned to the dressing-room where Zoé was waiting for her with some letters and visiting-cards, she was laughing merrily.

"I am done for!" she said; "they have carried off my fifty francs!"

She was not vexed; it only struck her as excessively droll that it happened to be men who had taken the money. All the same, however, they were brutes who left her without a sou.

But the sight of the cards and the letters brought back all her ill humor. The letters she did not mind: she even liked them if they were love-letters—they amused her. These came from men who had applauded her the evening before, and now declared their admiration.

As to the visitors they might go, and she became furious, once more, as she spoke:

"How many are there?" she asked, crossly.

"I do not know exactly," answered Zoé, "I have put them everywhere."

And she went on to say that the apartment was very convenient, for all the rooms opened on the corridor. It was not as at Madame Blanche's, where the visitors were compelled to go through the salon, which gave Madame Blanche many annoyances.

"You may go and send them off," repeated Nana, obstinately. "Begin with the Blackamoor."

"Oh! I sent him away long ago," answered Zoé, with a smile, "and he only wanted to say to Madame that he could not come this evening."

Nana clapped her hands with joy. He was not coming, she should be free! And she drew a long breath of intense relief. Her first idea was to send for Daguenet, poor fellow! whom she had told to wait until Thursday. Madame Maloir could easily write another letter, however. But Zoé said that Madame Maloir had slipped away without any one seeing her. Nana hesitated, therefore; after all, she was in no mood for company. She meant to go to bed and sleep through the night.

"Yes," she said, "I shall retire the moment I return from the theatre, and you are not to wake me until after noon the next day. And now," she continued, raising her voice, "will you get rid of all these creatures at once? They disgust me!"

Zoé did not move. She knew she had no right to interfere with Madame, but if Madame would think a minute, or would condescend to profit by the experience of her servant—

Zoé's words had no effect, and all at once she changed her tone:

"And Monsieur Steiner—am I to send him away also?"

"Most assuredly," answered Nana, "he may go first."

The woman lingered to give her mistress time for reflection. Would not Madame like to carry the Banker away from her rival? A gentleman, too, who was so rich and so well known about all the theatres?

"Hurry, my dear," resumed Nana, who was determined not to yield. "Hurry, and tell him that I consider him a terrible bore!"

Then all at once her mood changed, and she added:

"After all, if I wish to have him, the truest way is to turn a cold shoulder on him at first."

Zoé seemed quite struck by this, and looked at her mistress with sudden admiration; and then, without further arguments, departed to obey these commands.

In the meantime, Nana sat still, waiting until these men were fairly out of the door. At last she was free! She had room to move! What a singular and unexpected siege this was! She looked into the salon—it was empty, as was the dining-room. She drew a breath of relief. But as she moved about, opening and shutting doors, sure that she was alone, she suddenly discovered a youth sitting in a closet on a high trunk, with a solemn air, and an enormous bouquet upon his knees.

"Good heavens!" she cried, "they are not all gone, after all!"

The boy on seeing her, had leaped to his feet, as red as a poppy. He did not know what on earth to do with his bouquet, which he held first in one hand, and then in the other, and was covered with confusion. His youth, his embarrassment, and the quaint look he had with these flowers, touched Nana, who burst into a frank, hearty laugh. What! children too? Little men in swaddling clothes must come and torment her, must they? She patted his cheek in a familiar, maternal sort of way, and said:

"Who are you, and what is your name?"

"Georges Hujon," he answered, promptly; and then went on to tell her that he had seen her the night before, at the Variétés, and had now come to call on her.

"And to bring me these flowers?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Then why don't you give them to me, little miser?"

As she took the bouquet, he seized her hands and devoured them with kisses. She scolded, and was tempted to slap him, but her face flushed, and she smiled. She sent him away, nevertheless, telling him, however, that he might come again. He was dizzy, and could hardly find the door.

Nana returned to her dressing-room, where Francis was

waiting to dress her hair. She took her seat in front of the mirror, and submitted to the agile hands of the hair-dresser. She was very quiet, and hardly spoke. Zoé came in, looking flushed and vexed.

"Madame, there are three who will not go away."

"Very well, let them stay," she answered, quietly. 'When they are hungry, they will go of their own accord!"

Nana's ill-humor had vanished, and she now seemed quite amused at the idea of these men kicking their heels in her salon and ante-room. The door-bell now rang constantly, and Nana was tired of counting.

"One, two, three, four, five. Pshaw! This is a nuisance. They give me the headache!"

Then she had a sudden thought:

"And my pralines—where are they?"

Francis had forgotten the pralines, but he now drew them from the pocket of his coat with the air of a man of society offering a small cadeau, although he regularly put down each pound of pralines on his bill.

Nana put the package on her lap, and began to eat them, obeying, at the same time, the light pushes given by her hair-dresser to her head.

"Upon my life!" she exclaimed, after a brief silence, "they have begun again!"

And this was the case; the bell seemed to be rung by every variety of hand—timid fingers which just touched it, and long, vigorous pulls, abrupt and imperative.

Zoé muttered that Bordenave had certainly given the address to everybody who had been in the theatre the night before.

"By the way, Francis," said Nana, "have you five Louis about you?"

He stepped back a little and examined the edifice he had just erected, and then said, slowly:

"Five Louis? Well! that depends—"

"Ah! you know that I have no security to give you; but I don't think you need be very uneasy—"

And she made a little gesture toward the salon. Francis produced the five Louis.

Zoé had come back to dress her mistress, while the coif

feur calmly waited until Madame's toilette was completed that he might give the finishing touch to his work.

But the maid was obliged every few minutes to rush to the door, and notwithstanding all her experience, lost her head entirely. After having carefully put these guests into different corners, she was now obliged to place several of them in the same room, which was contrary to all her principles. "If they would only eat each other!" she muttered. And Nana was enchanted at this, and declared she could hear the crunching of bones.

"It is to be hoped they will not break anything in the room!" she murmured, and she listened uneasily.

Zoé showed in Labordette, and Nana uttered a cry of relief. He had come to tell her of a little matter of business which he had arranged for her.

She hardly listened to him, but said over and over again:

"I am going to take you with me; we will dine together, and then you will go with me to the Variétés. I do not appear, you know, until half-past nine."

What a comfort Labordette was! He never asked anything and was always doing kindnesses for her. He had dismissed the creditors in the ante-room.

"Let us be off," said Nana, as soon as she was dressed.

At this moment Zoé appeared.

"Madame, I can do no more! There is a queue on the stair-case!"

A queue on the stair-case! Even Francis, notwithstanding the English phlegm which he affected, began to laugh as he picked up his combs.

Nana quietly pushed Labordette into the kitchen and stole with him down the stairs, happy in knowing that she could be with one man who would treat her with indifference.

"You will bring me back to my door," she said, as they went down the stairs; "for I intend to sleep well and long to-night."

CHAPTER IV.

A RECEPTION IN THE BEST SOCIETY.

THE Comtesse Sabine, as Madame Muffat de Béville was called, to distinguish her from the mother of the Count, who had died the previous year, received every Wednesday in her Hôtel in La Rue Meromesnil, on the corner of La Rue de Panthièvre. It was a huge square dwelling, which had been inhabited by the Muffats for generation after generation for at least three hundred years; the façade upon the street was dark and gloomy with a certain conventual melancholy, as the blinds and curtains were nearly all closed. In the rear, at the end of a damp garden, trees had grown very tall, seeking the sun with long slender branches, which at last swept over the slates of the roof.

On one certain Wednesday, about ten o'clock, there were only about a dozen persons in the salon. When she expected only intimate friends, the Comtesse did not open the small salon nor the dining-room. It was more agreeable to sit around the fire and talk.

The salon was large and very lofty. Four windows looked out on the garden, the dampness of which, on this rainy April evening, made its way into the house in spite of the large logs which burned in the chimney. The sun never shone into this garden nor into this room. A chill, greenish light alone filled the salon, and in the evening it was hardly less gloomy, with its mahogany furniture and deep yellow hangings. All breathed of another age and of peace and devotion.

Opposite the arm-chair, where the elder Countess had died, square, high-backed and hard, stood a deep, low seat, a sort of bergère, whose red silk cushions were soft and luxurious. This was absolutely the only modern furniture or touch of fancy introduced amid this severity.

"Then," said the Countess, "we shall have the Shah of Persia—"

They were talking of the Princes who would be present at Paris for the Exposition. Several ladies were seated around the chimney. Madame du Joncquoy, whose brother had filled a Diplomatic position in the East, was giving some details of the Court of Nazar-Eddin.

"Do you not feel well, my dear?" asked Madame Chantereau, the wife of a great iron merchant, noticing that the Countess shivered and was very pale.

"No, indeed," the lady answered, with a smile. "I am only a little cold. This salon takes such an endless time to warm."

And she looked around at the high walls, and up to the ceiling. Estelle, her daughter, a girl of sixteen, small and insignificant in appearance, left the tabouret where she was sitting, and went silently to the fire to raise one of the logs which had fallen down.

But Madame de Chézelles, a convent friend of Sabine's, some five years younger than she, exclaimed:

"Goodness! would I not like to have a salon like this one! Here one can receive. It seems to me that the merest boxes are made nowadays. If I were only in your place—"

She spoke impulsively, with eager gesture, explaining how she would change the hangings, the furniture, everything, and would give balls which would startle all Paris. Behind her, her husband, a Magistrate, listened gravely. It was said that she was unfaithful to him, and did not even take the trouble to conceal it, but that he pardoned her, because she was a little insane.

The Comtesse smiled at all this, but said lazily that she should not be likely, after living seventeen years in a salon, to change it. No, it must remain as her mother-in-law had left it.

"I am told," she resumed, reverting to their previous conversation, "that we shall have also the King of Prussia, and the Emperor of Russia."

"And there will be superb entertainments," said Madame du Joncquoy.

The Banker Steiner, lately introduced by Léonide de Chézelles, who knew every one in Paris, was talking with a Deputy on a sofa between two windows; he was trying

to derive some information from him in regard to some suspected movements in the Bourse, while the Comte Muffat, standing by them, listened with a colder, grave air than usual. Three or four young men clustered near the door, around the Comte Xavier de Vandeuvres, who in a low voice was telling them some story, which was amusing and probably salacious, for they were dying with laughter. In the middle of the salon a stout individual, Chief of Bureau to the Minister of the Interior, was sleeping with his eyes open. But one of the young men apparently expressing some doubts of the story told by Vandeuvres, that gentleman raised his voice a little.

"You are too sceptical, Foucarmont. You will spoil all your pleasures."

And he laughed, and returned to the ladies, among whom he was always to be found. The last of a great race, effeminate and clever, he was throwing away a magnificent fortune in the most reckless manner.

His stable was the most famous in Paris, and cost him an enormous sum; his gambling debts were something fearful, and devoured his substance; each year a farm or two, or some forest lands disappeared, so that he had now but little left of his vast domains in Picardy.

"It is you," said Léonide, making room for him at her side; "it is you who spoil all your pleasures."

"Precisely!" he said. "I wish to allow others to profit by my experience."

But some one said, "Hush!" he would shock Monsieur Vénot. Then the ladies moving a little, showed half-reclining on a chaise longue a small man of about sixty, with bad teeth and a shrewd smile. He was as comfortably settled as if in the privacy of his own apartment, and drinking in every word.

With a little shrug he indicated that he was not easily shocked. Vandeuvres resumed his grand air, and added, gravely:

"Monsieur Vénot knows very well that I believe all that should be believed."

This was an act of religious faith. Léonide herself seemed satisfied. The young men in the room laughed

no more; the salon was quiet, a cold blast seemed to have passed over it, and Steiner's voice was heard, raised somewhat in his annoyance at not having gained that which he wished to know. The Comtesse Sabine looked at the fire, and then resumed the conversation.

"I saw the King of Prussia last year at Baden. He is still full of vigor for his years."

"Comte Bismarck will accompany him," said Madame du Joncquoy. "Do you know the Comte? I breakfasted with him at my brother's, oh! a very long time ago, when he represented Prussia in Paris. Now that is a man whose success I cannot comprehend."

"And why, pray?" asked Madame Chantereau.

"Good heavens! How can I tell you! He does not please me. He looks rough and ill-bred. Then, too, I think him very dull."

Then everybody began to talk of the Comte de Bismarck, in regard to whom opinion was much divided. Vandeuvres knew him, and assured the little circle that he could drink and gamble. In the height of this discussion the door of the salon opened, and Hector de La Faloise appeared, Fauchéry following him. Seeing the latter—whose first appearance under her roof this was—the Comtesse rose and went forward.

"Madame," said the Journalist, with a low bow, "you see that I have availed myself of your gracious invitation."

She smiled and said a courteous word or two, and reseated herself. Fauchéry saluted the Comte Muffat, and then stood somewhat ill at ease in the centre of the salon, where he recognized no one but Steiner. But Vandeuvres turned, and seeing him, came toward him, and shook hands.

Fauchéry, delighted to meet him, said in a low voice:

"It is for to-morrow, you know."

"The deuce it is!"

"Yes; at midnight, at her own house."

"I know, I know. I am going with Blanche."

And he tried to get away, and back to the ladies, in order to advance a new argument in favor of Monsieur de Bismarck. Fauchéry detained him.

"You can never divine the person whom she has bidden me invite."

And he made a sign toward the Comte Muffat, who was at that time engaged in a discussion with Steiner and the Deputy.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Vandeuvres, thunderstruck but amused.

"Upon my word! I promised her to bring him, and came here almost entirely for that purpose."

Both the men indulged in a silent laugh. And Vandeuvres returned to the ladies, saying as he did so:

"I assure you to the contrary! Monsieur Bismarck is very witty. For example, one evening I heard him say—"

And Vandeuvres went on to repeat an anecdote. La Faloise had heard the rapidly spoken words and looked at Fauchéry, hoping for an explanation which did not come. Of whom were they speaking? What were they going to do the next day at midnight? He determined not to leave his cousin, who had taken a chair and was looking about the room.

The Comtesse Sabine interested him especially. He had happened to know a good deal of her, and he knew that she was married at seventeen and was now thirty-four, and that she had led almost a cloistered life between her husband and her mother-in-law.

In society she was regarded by some persons as cold and austere. Others pitied her and spoke of her gay laugh and radiant eyes, before she was shut up in that dark and dreary old house.

Fauchéry examined her face quietly, and had his doubts.

One of his friends, a Colonel in the army, who had recently died in Mexico, had made to him the evening before his departure, one of those reckless confidences in which even the most discreet of men occasionally indulge. But his recollections were vague; he could only recall that the conversation had taken place after a very good dinner. And now that he saw the Comtesse amid her austere surroundings, in her simple black dress, and with her tranquil smile, he had his doubts, as we before said

A lamp standing behind her, and a little above her, threw out her delicate profile, in which the mouth alone, with its somewhat full lips, had a suggestion of imperious sensuality.

"What on earth are they talking about Bismarck for?" murmured La Faloise, who affected an ennuyé air in society. "It is intolerably stupid here. Why the deuce did you wish to come?"

But Fauchéry turned to him abruptly.

"Tell me. Has the Countess an admirer?"

"Good heavens! my dear fellow," stammered his cousin, considerably shocked; "do you know where you are? No, of course not."

Then realizing that this indignation was not in good style, he added, as he threw himself back in his chair, and said, languidly:

"I say no; but I really know nothing about it. There is a fellow—Foucarmont—that is always hovering about her. One thing is certain, that if the Countess amuses herself, she is caution itself."

He then went on, unquestioned by his cousin, to tell him all he knew of the Muffats. The conversation of the ladies in front of the fire continued, and these two men talked, therefore, in a low voice. Any one would have imagined, seeing their solemn faces, their white cravats and gloves, that they were discussing some subject of the gravest importance.

Madame Muffat the elder, whom La Faloise had known well, was, he declared, an insupportable old lady, who cared for nothing but her Curés. She was authoritative and exacting. As to Muffat, the posthumous son of a General, who was created a Comte by Napoleon I., he naturally found himself in favor after December Second. He, no more than his mother, was especially genial, but he passed for a good sort of man, whose only fault was, that he had so high an idea of himself, his dignity and his position at Court, that he carried his head among the clouds. La Faloise added that people were very lenient toward him, as he had been so badly brought up by his mother, who had compelled him to go each day to Confession, showed not the smallest indulgence, and allowed not the smallest

escapades—in fact, intended him to devote his life to the service of God. Muffat never jested as did Vandeuvres. His faith was great, and he gave way at times to paroxysms of religious excitement which were almost like attacks of brain fever. One last detail La Faloise whispered in his cousin's ear.

"Impossible," said the latter, laughing.

"So I am most credibly informed, I assure you. Even now, since his marriage."

Fauchéry laughed again as he looked at Comte Muffat, whose face, framed in whiskers without a moustache, seemed squarer and harder than ever, while he gave certain statistics to Steiner, with whom he was arguing.

"He has a head, certainly," he murmured. "A pretty present he has made to his wife! Poor child, I pity her!"

At that moment the Comtesse Sabine called him, but he did not hear her, so absorbed was he in the consideration of the Muffat affairs, which struck him as most extraordinary. She was obliged to repeat his name.

"Monsieur Fauchéry," she said, "have you not published a portrait of Monsieur de Bismarck? You have had more than one interview with him, have you not?"

He rose slowly and went toward the circle of ladies, replying with easy grace:

"Ah! Madame, I am forced to admit that I wrote the description merely from the biographies which have appeared in Germany. I have never seen Monsieur de Bismarck."

He stood near the Countess, but as he talked with her he continued the reflections of which she was the subject. She did not look her age; no one would have thought her more than twenty-eight. In her eyes lingered a dormant flame of youth, which her heavy lids carefully shaded. She had grown up in a divided household, spending a month with the Marquis de Chouard and then the next with the Marquise. She had married when almost a child, a month after her mother's death, driven to the step probably by her father, in whose path she was a great obstacle.

A terrible man was this Marquis, about whom strange stories were in circulation, notwithstanding his great

apparent piety. Fauchéry asked the Countess if he should not have the honor of paying his respects to her father that night.

"Certainly," she answered, "but he never came in until late. He was so very much occupied, and had very important work on hand."

The Journalist, who thought he knew perfectly well where the old gentleman passed his evenings, was very silent. A small mole that he noticed suddenly on the left cheek of the Countess astonished him, for Nana had precisely the same. It was certainly very odd. On this mole were three tiny hairs. Nana had the same, only hers were golden, while those of the Countess were black as jet.

"I have always felt the greatest admiration for Queen Augusta," continued the Countess. "They say she is so good and so pious. Do you think she will accompany the King?"

"It is reported that she will not," answered the Journalist.

No, this woman had no lover. It was impossible to believe the contrary when one saw her with her daughter, an uninteresting girl, who sat stiffly erect. This sepulchral salon, with its church-like odor, told the story of the iron hand under whose grasp her life had been passed. She had given none of her own individuality to this dreary mansion. It was Muffat who ruled there with his bigoted ideas, his penitences and his fasts. Fauchéry began to think that the Countess was a little silly, that she had not rebelled under this devotion. But the sight of the little old man with bad teeth and an acute smile, whom he suddenly perceived in his arm-chair behind the ladies, was to him a most decisive argument. He knew this person, Theophile Vénot, a lawyer whose spécialité lay in ecclesiastical processes. He had retired from his profession with a large fortune, and led a somewhat mysterious life—everywhere received and everywhere treated with great consideration, but at the same time with some fear, as if he represented a great force—an occult force which kept itself in the background.

His manner, nevertheless, was very humble. He was church-warden at La Madeleine, and had accepted a

position as Deputy of the Ninth Arrondissement merely to occupy his leisure moments, he said.

"The Countess is certainly well surrounded!" thought the Journalist, who escaped from the circle of ladies, and returned as soon as possible to his cousin.

"You are right," murmured Fauchéry; "it is unendurable here. We will be off as soon as I have executed a commission."

"What commission?" asked La Faloise, with eager curiosity.

Fauchéry did not reply. Steiner, whom the Comte Muffat and the Deputy had just left, came toward them, evidently much out of temper, and said, in a suppressed voice:

"Let them hold their tongues, if they choose; I can find those who will speak."

Then drawing the Journalist aside, and changing his tone, he said, jauntily:

"It is for to-morrow, I believe. Count on me, my dear fellow."

"I beg your pardon!" murmured Fauchéry, in astonishment.

"You don't know, then—Oh! I did not succeed in finding her at home; and Mignon threw every obstacle in my path. At last, however, she received me, and then she invited me—at twelve o'clock precisely—after the theatre."

The Banker was radiant, and with a wink he added, giving to his words a pointed emphasis:

"You stand pretty well with her; I fancy—"

Fauchéry looked vacant, as if he did not understand.

"Oh!" he said, "she wished to thank me for my article, you know."

"Yes, yes, I understand. Lucky dog! You have your reward. By the way, who pays for to-morrow?"

The Journalist shrugged his shoulders, as if to declare that no one knew. Vandeuvres summoned Steiner, that he might support his testimony in favor of Monsieur de Bismarck. Madame du Joncquoy wavered, and concluded by saying:

"He made on me a most painful impression. I thought

his expression most wicked. But I am willing to admit that he has great wit, which explains his success."

"Unquestionably," murmured Steiner, who was born at Cologne, and over whose lips flitted a faint smile at this way of judging the man of Sadowa.

On hearing this, La Faloise whispered to his cousin:

"Then you intend to sup with some woman to-morrow night, do you? Who is it? Come now—who is it?"

But Fauchéry made a little sign to signify he was heard, and that he must pay a certain respect to the place.

The door was at this moment thrown open, and an old lady entered, followed by a youth, in whom the Journalist was astonished to recognize the young collegian who, at the first representation of La Blonde Venus, had uttered the famous "Very chic," which people were still laughingly repeating.

The arrival of these guests changed the aspect of the room at once. The Comtesse Sabine hastily advanced, and took the lady by both hands with eager affection, calling her "my dear Madame Hujon."

Seeing his cousin watching this scene curiously, La Faloise uttered a few brief words of explanation in a low voice.

Madame Hujon was the widow of a Notary residing at Les Fondettes—an old estate belonging to her family near Orléans—preserving a *peid-à-terre* at Paris in a house which she owned in La Rue de Richelieu, and was in town just at this time to install and watch over her youngest son, who was beginning his study of the law. She had been a warm friend of the Marquise de Chouard, and had been present at the birth of the Countess, who had spent months at a time with her when a child, and before her marriage.

"I brought Georges to see you," said Madame Hujon to Sabine. "Has he not grown?"

The youth with his light hair and blue eyes, which gave him the look of a girl, saluted the Countess without the smallest embarrassment, and reminded her of a game of battledoor and shuttle-cock which they had played together two years before at Fondettes.

"And Philippe is not in Paris?" asked Comte Muffat, speaking of Madame Hujon's eldest son.

"Oh! no," she replied. "He is in garrison at Versailles."

She seated herself, and spoke with pride of this son who had been graduated at Saint Cyr—was a Captain at twenty-four after the Italian Campaign. All the ladies who knew her surrounded her with respectful sympathy.

And Fauchéry seeing this dignified Madame Hujon, with her maternal face and kindly smile—her stately head crowned by bands of white hair—said to himself, that it were utterly ridiculous to suspect the Comtesse Sabine for one single instant.

The low seat of tufted red silk where the Countess had re-established herself attracted his attention irresistibly. It was strangely unlike anything else in the room, and surely had never been introduced there, with its air of luxurious indolence, by the Count. It had a distinct look of its own, and Fauchéry's memory vainly sought to recall the confidences he had received one evening in that private cabinet at a restaurant.

He had desired to have the entrée at the Muffat mansion merely out of brutal curiosity. His friend had never returned from Mexico—who could tell what might happen! It was a stupid thing to do, certainly; but the idea attracted and haunted him.

"Well! shall we go?" asked La Faloise, who was determined to hear the name of the woman who was to give the supper, as soon as they got outside.

"Presently," answered Fauchéry; but he made no haste, pretending to himself that he had not yet given the invitation with which he had been intrusted, and which it was by no means easy to do. The ladies were talking of a ceremony that had just taken place—a taking of the veil, by which all Paris had been moved for at least three days. It was the eldest daughter of the Baronne de Fougeray, who had just entered the Carmelites, having a vocation which could not be gainsayed. Madame Chantereau, a relative of the Fougerays, told how the Baronne had taken to her bed the day after the ceremony—so overcome was she by grief. This did not astonish Madame du Joncquoy, who, however, had refused to attend the ceremony, knowing, as she said, that it would break her down completely.

"I had an excellent place," said Léonide, "and I thought it very beautiful."

Madame Hujon pitied the poor mother. What sorrow must be hers to lose her daughter in this way!

"I am accused of being too religious, too bigoted," she said, with tranquil frankness; "but, however this may be, I am none the less disposed to look on children who are thus determined, as very cruel. If I had a daughter, I would never consent to her burying herself alive in this way."

"Yes; it is a terrible thing," murmured the Countess, with a little shiver, and burying herself still more among her cushions before the fire.

The ladies fell into a discussion, but their voices were lowered and only an occasional gentle laugh was heard.

The two lamps on the chimney, covered with rose-colored lace, shed but a very subdued light, and, at the other end of the vast room, there were only three more.

Steiner was excessively ennuyée. He recounted to Fauchéry an adventure of that little Madame de Chézelles, whom he called Léonide, simply, "and who was no better than she should be," he muttered.

Fauchéry looked at her in her trained robe of pale blue satin sitting erect on the edge of her chair, and felt a light surprise at seeing her there. After all, this Parisian world was a most singular one. The most rigid salons were invaded by strange people. Evidently, that silent Theophile Vénot, with his equivocal smile, was a legacy from the late Countess, as well as the elder ladies, Madame Chantereau, Madame du Joncquoy, and four or five silent personages in the corner. Comte Muffat, it was, of course, who attracted those two or three officials whose irreproachable dress and air were such as were affected by the habitués of the Tuileries. Among others, the dull-eyed Chief of Bureau, alone in the centre of the room, buttoned up so tightly in his coat that he hardly dared move.

The young men and a few persons of very elegant manners were there through the Marquis de Chouard, who had kept up his relations with the Legitimists, by whom he was much ridiculed for entering the Council of State. Steiner and Léonide de Chézelles represented yet another

set which Fauchéry, to himself, called that of the Comtesse Sabine.

"Another time," continued Steiner in his ear. "Léonide allowed her tenor to come to Montauban; she lived at her Château de Beaurecueil, two leagues away, and came every day in her calèche with two horses to see him at the Leon d'Or where he was staying. The carriage stood at the door for hours at a time, while people gathered and looked at it and the horses."

An appalling silence now fell on the salon. Two young men continued to whisper for a moment or two, then they also relapsed into silence, and only the heavy step of the Comte Muffat was heard as he crossed the salon to seat himself near Madame Chantereau. The lamps seemed to be going out as was the fire, and a heavy shadow settled down on the old friends of the house in the arm-chairs wherein they had sat for twenty years. It was as if the guests had suddenly felt the icy presence of the Count's mother. The Comtesse Sabine at last spoke:

"The story goes that the young man died, and that will explain the sudden determination of this poor child. It is said, however, that her father would never have consented to the marriage."

"Many other things are said," cried Léonide, heedlessly, and she began to laugh. Sabine was also infected by this gayety, and she also laughed aloud. And these sounds in this large, solemn room struck Fauchéry most strangely—it was like the breaking of crystal—and it broke the ice. Everybody began to talk. Madame du Joncquoy protested. Madame Chantereau declared that the preliminary steps for the marriage had been taken, but that matters rested there. Then the men joined in. There was for a little, a confusion of opinions, where the different elements of the salon—the Bonapartists and the Legitimists—mingled with modern skeptics, elbowed each other.

Estelle rang for wood to be put on the fire, and the man turned up the lamps. It was like a grand awakening. Fauchéry smiled with an air of relief. The Comtesse was to him very fascinating with her little mole like Nana, "the devil's mark." He was determined to make further discoveries. And, as he looked about the room, he said to

himself in his journalist argot that there was certainly a *fêlure* somewhere.

"Then it seems that they espouse Heaven when they can't marry their cousins," muttered Vandeuvres between his teeth. "My dear fellow, did you ever see a woman who was beloved, that entered a convent?"

He did not wait for a reply; he had had as much as he could stand, and, dropping his voice, added:

"Now, then; how many shall we be to-morrow—the Mignons, Steiner, you, Blanche and I—whom else?"

"Caroline, I fancy; Georgette; Gaga, undoubtedly. One can never tell exactly. It is one of those occasions when you expect twenty and find forty."

Vandeuvres, still looking at the ladies, changed the subject abruptly.

"This Madame du Joncquoy must have been very handsome fifteen years ago. Poor Estelle has grown frightfully thin." Then, with another abrupt change, he returned to the supper. "The most stupid thing," he said, "at such places is, that there are always the same women present. I wish to Heavens we could find some new ones. Try and invent some for us, won't you?"

"I have an idea. I will ask that stout man to bring the woman he had with him at the Variétés the other night."

He spoke of the Chief of Bureau, who was sound asleep in the middle of the room.

Fauchéry followed from afar, with considerable amusement, the opening of this delicate negotiation. Vandeuvres drew a chair close to that of the stout gentleman, who was very dignified. They seemed to be discussing the question which occupied the salon—that is, the real motives which impelled a girl to enter a convent. Then the young Count returned to the Journalist.

"It is not possible. He says she would refuse. But I feel certain that I once saw her at Laura's."

"What! Do you go there?" murmured Fauchéry, with a laugh. "You risk yourself in such places! I thought it was only poor devils like ourselves—"

"Ah! my dear fellow," interrupted his companion, "it is as well to know everything."

Then they talked sneeringly, with fiercely shining eyes,

of the table d'hôte in La Rue des Martyrs, where fat Laure Piedefer, for three francs, fed those women who were in pecuniary difficulties. A nice hole it was, too! All the women kissed Laure on the mouth! As the Countess Sabine quickly turned her head, having caught a word or two of this talk, the two men drew back a little further, and laughed still more heartily. They had not noticed Georges Hujon, who was listening to them, flushing so deeply that his ears and girlish throat were all red. The boy was at once filled with shame and delight. He had had eyes only for Madame de Chézelles, since his mother had introduced him to the salon. She was the only woman there whom he thought had any chic.

And yet Nana surpassed her!

"I went yesterday to make some visits," said Madame Hujon. "Georges accompanied me; and in the evening Georges took me to the theatre. Yes, to the Variétés, where I have certainly not been before for ten years. This child adores music. I must confess that I was not much amused, but he was very happy. The plays nowadays are most singular. Nor did the music please me particularly."

"Are you not fond of music, Madame?" exclaimed Madame du Joncquoy, raising her eyes to heaven. "Is it possible that there is any one who is not fond of music?"

There was a general exclamation. No one said a word, however, about this play at the Variétés, of which dear, good Madame Hujon understood nothing. These ladies knew all about it; but they said nothing—on the contrary, they began an enthusiastic discussion upon the various masters. Madame du Joncquoy liked only Weber; while Madame Chantereau's taste inclined to the Italian school. The voices of these ladies were low and languishing, and they spoke from the depths of their chairs. Count Muffat listened to them without entering into the argument. It seemed as if there were a little intoning, like a chapel, going on before that chimney.

"Come, now!" murmured Vandeuvres to Fauchéry again, "we must invent a woman for to-morrow. Suppose we ask Steiner."

"Oh! Steiner," said the Journalist, "we don't want any of his selection."

Vandeuvres, meanwhile, seemed to be buried in thought.

"I have it!" he cried, eagerly. "I met Foucarmont the other day, with a lovely little creature. I shall go and tell him he must bring her!"

And he called Foucarmont, and the two men exchanged a few rapid words. But a complication seemed to arise, for they threaded their way through the ladies' long trains, and found another youth, whom they drew into the embrasure of a window.

Fauchery, left alone, went toward the chimney just as Madame du Joncquoy was saying that she could never hear Weber played without seeing lakes, and forests, and the sun rising and setting behind the hills. Some one touched his shoulder, and Fauchéry, turning, saw that it was La Faloise, who said, reproachfully:

"Don't you intend to get me an invitation for that supper to-morrow?"

Fauchéry was about to answer, when Vandeuvres reappeared.

"It seems," he said, in a low voice, "that Foucarmont has not much to do with that woman. She is the especial property of that boy over there. She can't come; but Foucarmont says that he will try and bring Louise, of the Palais Royale."

"Monsieur de Vandeuvres," said Madame Chantereau, raising her voice, "is it not true that Wagner was hissed on Sunday?"

"Most fiercely, Madame," he replied, advancing with his usual politeness; then, as no one offered to detain him, he drew back again and continued his conversation with the men about him.

"I must see," he said, "if some of those young fellows don't know any women."

Presently he was seen, smiling and gracious, going from man to man in the salon. He mingled with each group, and slipped a word or two into the ear of each man, who turned with a wink of intelligence. It was like a mot d'ordre, which he distributed with his easy air of distinction—the same phrase to each. Such matters make themselves understood with very few words, and the sentimental dissertations of the ladies on music covered his voice.

"No; don't talk to me of your Germans," repeated Madame Chantereau. "Music is gayety and light. Have you heard Patti in Le Barbier?"

"Delicious!" murmured Léonide, who only drummed opera airs on the piano.

"Now I am going to shock you all!" cried Madame Hujon. "I admit frankly that I do not understand one any better than the other. When an air pleases me, it pleases me, and that is all there is about it."

The Countess rose as she saw her daughter Estelle enter the room, whom she had sent to give an order for tea. As a table was being relieved of its thousand and one incumbrances by a footman, the Countess riveted her eyes on the Comte de Vandeuvres. She smiled faintly, and her parted lips disclosed her white teeth. As the Count passed her, she said:

"What are you plotting, Monsieur de Vandeuvres?"

"I, Madame?" he answered, quietly. "I am plotting nothing whatever."

"Ah! I saw you so very busy, but now I wish to make you useful."

And she put an album into his hands, and begged him to lay it upon the piano, and then sent him to ask the ladies if they would take tea or chocolate. But all the same, occupied as he was, he managed, going or coming, to whisper in Fauchéry's ear, that they would have Tatan Néné, who had the most beautiful voice in Paris, and Maria Blond, who had just made her début at the Folies. Meanwhile, La Faloise stood a little apart deliberately waiting for an invitation. He finally ended by asking for one. Vandeuvres engaged him to bring Clarisse, and, as La Faloise affected some scruples, he said, en passant:

"If I ask you to come, that is enough. I will present you. The more persons I ask the better will she be pleased!"

La Faloise wanted to know the name of this mysterious "she." But the Comtesse had recalled Vandeuvres, whom she questioned in regard to the manner in which English people made tea. He went to England often, and had horses running there. According to him, only Russians knew how to make tea, and he gave her the receipt. Then, as if another current of thought were all the time going

on within him, he suddenly started off, and, looking around the room, asked where the Marquis was, and if they were not going to see him.

"Certainly you are," answered the Countess. "At all events he promised to come, and I confess to becoming a little uneasy. His business must have detained him much later than he supposed."

Vandeuvres smiled discreetly. He, too, seemed to have some idea of the precise nature of the Marquis de Chouard's labors. He determined to obtain from that gentleman the name of a very beautiful woman, with whom he was sometimes seen, and therefore waited a while longer. Fauchéry said that the time had come for him to give the invitation to the Comte Muffat, for it was growing late.

"Are you in earnest?" asked Vandeuvres, who really had supposed it a jest.

"In earnest? To be sure I am. If I fail to do her bidding she will tear out my eyes."

"Then I must assist you, that is all."

The clock struck eleven. The Countess, assisted by her daughter Estelle, poured out tea. As there were only the habitués of the house present, there was no ceremony, and the cups were handed to and fro, as well as plates with buttered rolls. The ladies sat before the fire drinking their tea slowly. From music the conversation fell to confectioners. Boissier was the only place to go for things, and to Catherine for ices. There was no vivacity of speech, a certain lassitude had invaded the salon. Steiner had again captured the Deputy, and kept him cornered. Monsieur Vénot, whose teeth were spoiled by over-indulgence in sweets, nibbled his cakes with a noise like a young mouse, while the Chief of Bureau, with his nose in a cup of chocolate, seemed inclined to keep it there for the next hour. The Countess went slowly from one to another, discovering the tastes of each without pertinacity or entreaties, lingered for a moment by the men, and smiled and went on. The heat of the fire had flushed her cheek, and she seemed the sister of her daughter, the thin dark girl at her side. As she approached De Fauchéry, who was talking with her husband and Vandeuvres, she noticed that they ceased speaking. She passed on, and

offered the cup of tea she held in her hand to Georges Hujon.

"A lady asks you to supper," said the Journalist, gayly, addressing the Comte Muffat. That gentleman, who had preserved a gloomy expression all the evening, seemed much astonished as he asked, "What lady?"

"Oh! Nana," answered Vandeuvres, abruptly.

The Comte became very grave. His eyelids trembled a little, while a certain uneasiness flitted over his face.

"You have been to her house," continued Vandeuvres.

"What! Been to her house! Ah! to be sure, the other day for the Charitable Association of which I am a member. I had forgotten that. No matter, I do not know her, and therefore it would be impossible for me to accept."

His tone was ice itself, as if to indicate that he regarded this as a jest, and also as in the worst possible taste. A man like himself was out of place at the table of such a woman.

Vandeuvres cried out at this; it was a supper of artists; talent covered a multitude of sins. But without listening to Fauchéry, who began to tell the story of a dinner where the Prince d'Ecosse, the son of the Queen, was seated at the side of a former singer in a Café Concert, the Comte repeated his refusal; he even showed considerable irritation veiled by an effort at extreme courtesy.

In the meantime, La Faloise and Georges, as they drank their tea, had heard considerable of what was going on.

"Ah! it is at Nana's," murmured La Faloise; "and just what I suspected."

Georges said nothing, but his color rose and his eyes flashed. In the last few days he had made rapid strides in a path of vice.

"I do not know her address," added La Faloise.

"Boulevard Haussmann, between La Rue de l'Arcade and La Rue Pasquier, third floor," said Georges, breathlessly.

And as the other looked at him with surprise, the boy added in an embarrassed, but consequential tone:

"I am going; she asked me this morning."

A great stir now took place in the salon. Fauchéry and Vandeuvres could not urge the Comte, and the Marquis de Chouard entered. All the men hurried forward to

greet him. He advanced slowly, and with apparent difficulty. He stopped in the centre of the room. His face was pale, and he blinked his eyes as if he came out of some dark place and was blinded by the lights.

"I was afraid, dear father," said the Comtesse, "that I was not to see you to-night, and in that case I should have been uneasy until to-morrow."

He looked at her as if he did not quite understand what she said. His nose, which was large, had a swollen look, while his under lip hung down. Madame Hujon, seeing him so overcome, felt a great compassion for him.

"You work too hard," she said. "You ought to rest. At our age we should leave work to the young people."

"Work! oh, yes, work!" he stammered, after a while. "There is always too much work."

He sank into a chair, passing his hand with a gesture that was habitual to him through his white hair, whose scanty curls were pushed behind his ears.

"At what are you working so late?" asked Madame du Joncquoy. "I thought you were at the reception at the Minister's."

The Countess interposed. "My father is drawing up an important bill."

"Yes, an important bill," he said. "A very important one. It is in connection with the manufactories. I am anxious that Sunday shall be more respected. It is a great shame that the government will not take more vigorous steps. The churches are empty, and we are hastening to destruction."

Vandeuvres looked at Fauchéry. Both of them were behind the Marquis. When Vandeuvres took him aside and asked him about the beautiful woman they had seen with him, he affected the greatest surprise. He had seen that several of the young men were listening with all their ears, and declared that he knew of no such person; could she have been Madame Dechard, with whom he occasionally spent a day or two at Virofloy? Vandeuvres found his revenge in saying, quietly:

"Where can you have been? Your elbow is covered with spiders' webs and plaster."

"My elbow!" the old man answered, slightly embar-

passed. "Ah! to be sure, I must have touched some dirty corner as I came down-stairs from my office."

Several persons now went away. It was nearly midnight. A valet, aided by a woman-servant, noiselessly removed the empty cups scattered about the room. The ladies in front of the fire had contracted their circle, and talked more freely than earlier in the evening. The salon itself was half asleep; long shadows seemed creeping up the walls. Then Fauchéry spoke of retiring, but lingered once more to watch the Countess Sabine. She was reposing from her exertions as mistress of the house, and had taken her usual seat and was silently watching a half-consumed log of wood, with a face so delicately pale and self-controlled that his doubts were strengthened. In the fire-light, the three black hairs of the mole she had on her cheek glittered like gold, and resembled Nana's precisely. He could not refrain from saying a word or two about it in the ear of Vandeuvres, who had never noticed it, and both continued the parallel between the Countess and Nana. They found a vague resemblance in the mouth and chin, but the eyes were totally unlike. Then, too, Nana had a jolly, good-natured air, while the Countess suggested a sleeping cat, with claws lightly sheathed.

"I don't know what to think of her," said Fauchéry.

Vandeuvres touched him on the elbow, and nodded toward Estelle, who sat stiff and erect on her tabouret just in front of them. Involuntarily they had raised their voices, and she must have heard them, but of this she gave no sign. They drew back a little, and Vandeuvres told Fauchéry that the Countess was one of the best and purest of women.

But at this moment the voices by the chimney were elevated. Madame du Joncquoy was saying:

"I have admitted that Monsieur de Bismarck is possibly a man of talent, but genius is a vastly different thing."

They had evidently returned to their old subject of dispute.

"What! Monsieur Bismarck again!" murmured Fauchéry. "This time I am off for good!"

"Wait!" said Vandeuvres, "we must have a decisive word from the Count."

Count Muffat was talking with his father-in-law and several of the elder men. Vandeuvres took him aside and renewed his invitation, and said that he was himself going to the supper. A man could go anywhere. No one would attribute to him worse motives than curiosity.

The Comte listened in silence to their arguments with a stony face. Vandeuvres felt that he was hesitating, when the Marquis de Chouard approached with an interrogative air, and when he understood the question under discussion—and the invitation had been extended to himself, he looked stealthily at his son-in-law, while the color rose to his pale face and suffused it with red patches. There was a long silence, which was not without its awkwardness, but they encouraged each other, and would undoubtedly have ended by accepting, if Comte Muffat had not suddenly noticed Monsieur Vénot's eyes fixed upon him intently. The little old man was no longer smiling; his sharp eyes glittered like steel in his sallow face.

"No," repeated the Count, in a tone that was so firm and distinct that there was nothing more to be said.

The Marquis refused with even more energy. He indulged in a little morality. The higher classes owed it to themselves to set a good example.

Fauchéry smiled and shook hands with Vandeuvres. He did not linger then, but departed at once, because it was necessary that he should go to work on an article.

"At Nana's, precisely at twelve o'clock," he said, in a low voice. La Faloise left also. Steiner, who had made his adieux to the Countess, was already at the door. Other men followed them, and the words "At Nana's, precisely at twelve o'clock," was heard from lip after lip as they put on their paletots in the ante-room. Georges, who of course could not go until his mother gave the word, was on the threshold, ready with the exact address. Fauchéry, before he left, took one more glance into the salon. Vandeuvres had returned to the circle of women, and was laughing with Léonide de Chézelles. Comte Muffat and the Marquis de Chouard had joined in the conversation, while good Madame Hujon drowsed in her arm-chair. Half concealed by her ample skirts was little Monsieur Vénot, who had regained his smiles. Twelve o'clock struck slowly.

"Do you really think," resumed Madame du Joncquoy. "that Monsieur de Bismarck will make war on us and will beat us? For Heaven's sake do not say that!"

And everybody laughed at Madame Chantereau, who had advanced this monstrous idea, which she had imbibed in Alsace, where her husband had some manufactories.

"We have the Emperor fortunately," said Comte Muffat, with all his official solemnity.

These were the last words heard by Fauchéry. He closed the door with one glance more at the Comtesse Sabine. She was conversing with the Chief of Bureau and seemed absorbed in what that gentleman was saying. He had certainly been deceived. It was very strange!

"Well! are you coming?" cried La Faloise.

And as they separated in the street they said:

"I shall see you at Nana's to-morrow?"

"Oh! to be sure. To-morrow at Nana's."

CHAPTER V.

A MIDNIGHT SUPPER.

EARLY in the morning Zoé surrendered the apartment to a Maître d'Hôtel sent by Brébant with his staff of aides and garçons.

It was Brébant who was to furnish everything—the supper, glass and china, linen and flowers, as well as chairs and sofas. Nana could not have discovered a dozen napkins in her wardrobe, and although she had not had time to arrange her surroundings according to her new prospects, she preferred to have the restaurant come to her rather than go to the restaurant. It seemed to her much more chic. She wished to inaugurate her great success by a fête, a supper, to which she could invite as many as she pleased.

As the dining-room was too small, the Maître d'Hôtel had had the table laid in the salon—a table for twenty-five guests, a little too close together possibly.

"Is everything ready?" asked Nana, as she came in a few moments after twelve.

"Ah! I don't know," answered Zoé, crossly. "Heaven be praised! I have had nothing to do with it all. They have upset everything in the kitchen, and everywhere else, too. I have not interfered with them in any way. The two others have been here twice."

By the "two others" Zoé meant the two old friends of Nana—the merchant and Du Valoque, whom Nana had decided to dismiss, certain as she was of the future, and desiring to shed her old skin, as she delicately expressed herself.

"They are great nuisances!" she murmured. "If they come back again, threaten them with the police!"

Then she called Daguenet and Georges, who were in the ante-room removing their overcoats and hats. They had both waited for her at the stage door—Passage des Panor-

amas—and she had brought them home in her fiacre. She did not wish to leave them alone to bore each other, as no one else had arrived. They might come into her dressing-room, where Zoé was about to arrange her dress a little. A few white roses were placed in her hair and on her corsage. The tiny room was filled with the furniture from the salon and dining-room, which had been rolled in there—guéridons, sofas and chairs, standing with their feet in the air. As she turned, her skirt caught in a castor, and was torn, whereat she spoke violently, saying that such things only happened to her. She tore off her dress—a simple white foulard, exquisitely delicate and soft in its clinging folds. But she put it on again almost immediately, not happening to find another that hit her fancy, and with tears in her eyes declared it was a shame that she should be dressed like a rag-picker. Daguenet and Georges pinned up the rent, while Zoé rearranged her hair. The whole three busied themselves about her, and finally laughed, when Daguenet told her that it was not more than fifteen minutes past twelve. She had hurried the third act of the Blonde Venus, and cut it wherever she dared, in her anxiety to be at her rooms a little in advance of her guests.

"Yes, I did cut a little," she answered. "Anyway, it is always too good for that crowd of gaping idiots. Did you see the audience to-night? Zoé, don't go to bed; stay here; I may need you. Here they come!"

And she ran away. Georges was half sitting on the floor, where he had been arranging her skirt. He colored when Daguenet looked at him, but the two seemed to have taken a great fancy to each other. They retied the knots of their cravats at the tall Psyche, and gave each other's coats, which were white from Nana's powder, a little friendly brush.

"It looks just like sugar!" said Georges, with his boyish laugh.

A lacquey, hired for the night, showed the guests into the little salon—a very small room, in which only four chairs had been left to accommodate all these people. From the large salon next came the clatter of silver and

glass, while from under the door came a streak of bright light.

Nana, on coming in, found Clarisse installed in one of the fauteuils—Clarisse Besnus, who had been brought by La Faloise.

"So, you are the first?" Nana exclaimed, familiarly.

"Yes, he and I," answered Clarisse, with a little ill-natured nod toward La Faloise. "He was in deadly terror lest he should be late. If I had listened to him, I should not have even taken time to take off my rouge and my wig!"

The young man, who saw Nana for the first time, came forward and bowed, speaking of his cousin, and concealing his embarrassment under the most exaggerated politeness.

But Nana hardly listened, shook hands with him hastily, and went forward to receive Rose Mignon, at that moment announced.

All at once she became amiable and extremely courteous.

"Ah! dear Madame, I am so much obliged to you for coming—"

"And I am rejoiced at doing so, I assure you," answered Rose, not to be outdone in politeness.

"Take this chair. What can I give you?"

"Nothing, thanks. Steiner, I have forgotten my fan; it is in the pocket of my pelisse—the right pocket, Steiner."

Steiner and Mignon had followed her closely. The Banker went back and got the fan, while Mignon, in the most fraternal manner, kissed Nana, and compelled Rose to do the same. Were they not all the same family at this theatre? Then he winked, as if to encourage Steiner to follow the example; but he, disturbed by an expression he read on the face of Rose, contented himself by pressing a kiss on Nana's hand.

"Madame Blanche, Monsieur Le Comte Xavier de Vandeuvres," announced the valet.

Deep bows were exchanged. Nana, the very embodiment of ceremonious politeness, led Blanche de Sévry to a sofa. Each tried to rival the other in politeness.

In the meantime Vandeuvres was telling how Fauchéry had got into a dispute with the concierge, because he had

refused to admit Lucy Stewart's carriage. Before she appeared, however, she was heard in the ante-room showering opprobrious epithets on the concierge.

But when the lacquey opened the door, she advanced with her usual smiling grace, introduced herself and took both Nana's hands, saying that she had loved her as soon as she saw her.

Nana, whose vanity was flattered by the rôle she was playing of mistress of the house, thanked her in some confusion. She seemed, too, to be uneasy as soon as Fauchéry appeared. She went to him as soon as she could, and said, in a low voice:

"Will he come?"

"No; he did not choose to," answered the Journalist, abruptly, on being attacked thus suddenly—although he had prepared a very nice little story to excuse the refusal of Comte Muffat.

He realized his stupidity when he saw the sudden pallor of the young girl, and he tried to soften his words.

"He could not, for he was obliged to show himself at a Ministerial ball with his wife."

"Very well," murmured Nana, who in her heart suspected him of some underhand proceedings. "I will settle with you, my dear, some fine day!"

"Ah!" he answered, wounded by the threat. "I wish you would not employ me to execute such commissions. Ask Mignon or Labordette."

They turned their backs to each other, and both were very angry.

Steiner heard all this, and when he got an opportunity he said to her in a low voice, with the good-natured cynicism of a friend who wishes to please another:

"You know that he is dying to come; only he is afraid of his wife. Will you not excuse him?"

Nana looked as if she did not understand. She smiled and glanced at Rose, and at her husband, and then said to the Banker, with a smile:

"Monsieur Steiner, you will sit next to me."

At this moment gay laughter came from the ante-room, and a great buzz of voices, as if a whole convent had taken shelter there, and Labordette appeared, bringing with him

five women—his boarding-school, as Lucy Stewart wickedly whispered.

There was Gaga, majestic in a robe of blue velvet, which was so tight she could scarce breathe. Caroline Héquet in black faille and Chantilly lace as usual; then Leá de Horn as badly dressed as was her habit; the fair and pondrous Tatan Néné, a good-natured creature, with a flood of senseless chatter at which everybody laughed, and Marie Blond—a girl of fifteen—frightfully thin and frightfully vicious, who had just made her début at the Folies. Labordette had brought them all in one carriage, and they were still laughing at the manner in which they had been crowded—Marie Blond on the knees of the others. But they compressed their lips, bowed and courtesied in the most *comme il faut* fashion. Gaga was especially girlish, and displayed a great deal of manner.

Tatan Néné, who had been told on her way thither that six negroes, in startling costume, would serve Nana's supper, looked a little uneasy and asked when they would appear.

Labordette treated her with contempt, and bade her hold her tongue.

"And Bordenave?" asked Steiner.

"Oh! isn't it too bad," cried Nana, "that he cannot be with us to-day?"

"Yes," said Rose Mignon; "he has sprained his ankle frightfully. If you could hear him swear with his leg all swathed, and up on a chair!"

Then everybody mourned over Bordenave. No one gave such good suppers as Bordenave. But he was presently forgotten, and another subject was advanced, when all at once a loud voice was heard:

"Upon my word! It is exactly as if I had just been buried!"

Everybody started, everybody looked around. It was Bordenave who spoke, standing on the threshold, flushed and big, leaning on Simonne's shoulder. She was the favorite of the moment. This girl, who had been well educated and could play the piano and speak English, was a delicate little blonde, so frail that she bent like a reed under Bordenave's rough weight; but was sweetly

smiling and submissive. He stood a few moments, feeling that he and the pretty creature with him made quite a tableau.

"I said to myself," he continued, "that I would come if it killed me. And here I am!" He checked himself and uttered a frightful oath.

Simonne had moved a little too fast for him. He gave her a push, and she, without ceasing to smile, dropped her pretty head like an animal afraid of being beaten, all the time exerting the strength in her dimpled frame to sustain him. Amid eager exclamations, a chair was rolled forward, into which Bordenave allowed himself to drop, while the other women placed another for his foot. And all the actresses who were there, kissed him as a matter of course.

He groaned and sighed; but presently, as the pain abated, exclaimed:

"You will see that my appetite is all right, whatever my ankle may be!"

Other guests now arrived, and the small salon was absolutely stifling. The clatter of silver and glass had ceased in the next room, and a tremendous quarrel was apparently going on; while above all, the voice of the Maître d'Hôtel was heard.

Nana began to grow impatient, and wondered, as all her guests had arrived, why supper was not announced.

She sent Daguenet and Georges to ask what was going on, and was considerably taken aback at seeing a number of strangers, men and women, enter the room, whom she had never before seen.

In some embarrassment she turned to Bordenave, Mignon, and Labordette. They were no wiser than herself. Then she hastily summoned the Comte de Vandeuvres; he suddenly remembered that they were the young men he had asked at Comte Muffat's. Nana thanked him cordially, but said more seats must be placed at the table; they would certainly be very crowded, and, after counting, she begged Labordette to have seven additional plates laid.

Hardly had he disappeared, than three more individuals entered the room, which would really hold no more. Nana

began to grow angry, and said, with her grand air, that really this was not *convenable*.

But, when two more appeared, she began to laugh, declaring that it was too ridiculous.

Only Gaga and Rose Mignon were seated; Bordenave occupied two other chairs. The buzz of voices was occasionally checked by light yawns.

"Tell me, my dear," said Bordenave, "are we to sit at the table just the same—and is not every one here?"

"Certainly," she answered, with a laugh; "we are all here!"

As she spoke she looked around and suddenly became very serious as if astonished at the absence of some one whom she expected. They would wait a few minutes longer. Presently the guests perceived among them a tall, gentlemanly man, with white hair and a magnificently handsome beard. Strangely enough, no one had seen him enter—he had glided into the little salon through a door leading to the bed-room. A silence fell upon the room, followed by low whispers. Comte de Vandeuvres knew who this gentleman was, for he shook hands with him, but he replied only with a smile, to the questions eagerly addressed him by the women.

Then Caroline Héquet, in a low voice, said something about an English Lord who was to leave the next day for London, where he was to be married. This tale ran the round of the ladies; but Maria Blond declared that he was, on the contrary, a German Ambassador, whom she had frequently seen with one of her friends.

Among the men, a few rapid words were exchanged. He was evidently a person of importance and ample means. It was probably he who paid for the supper—which was all very well, particularly if the supper were good. But this point was yet to be settled. All at once the Maître d'Hôtel threw open the folding doors into the grand Salon.

"Madame is served!" he said, loftily.

Nana had taken Steiner's arm without seeming to notice that her unknown friend had taken a step or two toward her. He dropped a little behind, and entered the room alone. There was very little ceremony; the crowd was

really too great, and the men and women found it rather amusing. A long table ran from one end to the other of the large room, and yet this table was too small, for the plates touched each other.

Four candelabras, with ten candles in each, were placed at equal distances, an epergne with flowers in the centre.

The undoubted air of a restaurant pervaded the whole—the chipped china plates, the plated forks and spoons, tarnished and worn from constant washing, while the glass was made up of different kinds. The arrangements suggested a housewarming given before things were in their places, on the occasion of a sudden increase of fortune. One lustre was missing. The candles in the four candelabras shed a very pale and yellow light over the compotiers and bowls symmetrically arranged, in which fruit and confections alternated.

"You know," said Nana, "that you are all to sit just where you please—it is much more amusing."

She stood in the centre of the table. The elderly gentleman with the handsome face, whom no one knew, took his place at her right, while she kept Steiner on her left.

A number of her guests slipped into their seats, when, all at once, oaths were heard from the salon. Bordenave had been forgotten, and he had the greatest difficulty in disentangling himself from his two chairs, shouting as he did so for that scamp of a Simonne who had fled with the others.

The women all ran to him full of compassion. Bordenave presently appeared escorted and assisted by Caroline, Clarisse, Tatan Néné, and Maria Blond; but it was with no small difficulty that he was installed.

"He must sit opposite Nana!" cried some one. "Bordenave in the middle—he must preside!"

The ladies seated him directly opposite Nana, but he needed a second chair. Two of the women carefully raised his lame foot and stretched it out. He must sit with his side to the table, but that would not matter, he could eat just as well.

He had Rose on one side and Lucy Stewart on the other, and they promised to take good care of him. At last every one was established. The Comte de Vandeu-

vres was between Lucy Stewart and Clarisse—Fauchéry between Rose Mignon and Caroline Héquet. Hector de Faloise hurried to secure a place by Gaga's side. Daguenet and Georges Hujon were at the end of the table among the younger men.

It was suddenly discovered that two persons were standing, and all the chairs were moved closer together. This time it was proposed that two should eat from the same plates, and Steiner politely offered to take Nana on his knees. Clarisse, who could not move her elbows, told Vandeuvres that she should rely on his feeding her. Bordenave, all this time, was occupying the places of three persons with his chairs. The guests were packed, as Mignon said, like herring in a barrel.

"*Purée d'asperges Comtesse. Consommé à la Deslignac*," murmured the waiters, carrying the soup behind the guests.

Bordenave advised every one to take the consommé, when there arose an outcry of dismay. Three late guests arrived—one woman and two men. This was really too much. Nana half closed her eyes to see who these newcomers were. The woman was Louise Violaine, but she did not think she had ever seen the men.

"My dear," said Vandeuvres, "this gentleman is a Naval officer, and a friend of mine, whom I took the liberty of asking—Monsieur de Foucarmont."

Foucarmont bowed with easy grace.

"And I," he said, smilingly, "ventured to bring with me a friend."

"All right!" said Nana. "Try and find a seat. Clarisse, can't you move a little closer to your neighbor? You are too wide apart down there."

Her guests obeyed, and Foucarmont and Louise found a small corner, but the friend sat at some distance, and could only eat over his neighbor's shoulder. The waiters took away the soup plates, and *créponettes de la perdeaux aux truffes* and *mokys au parmesan* circulated.

Bordenave stirred up the whole table by saying that he had had an idea of bringing with him Prullière, Fontan, and old Bosc.

Nana adopted an air of dignity, and said coldly that she

would have received them possibly in a way they would not have liked. If she had wanted any of them, she would have invited them herself. Old Bosc was always tipsy, and Fontan was unendurable, with his stupidity and noise: strolling players were always out of place with gentlemen.

"That is true," murmured Mignon.

In dress coats and white cravats, which in themselves gave an air of distinction, the men sat erect around the table. The white-haired stranger was as elegant and reserved in manner, as if presiding at a Congress of Diplomats.

Vandeuvres' manner could not have been more polished, had he been sitting at the table of the Comtesse de Muffat. That morning Nana had said to her aunt that, so far as the men went, she could not have better; they were all noble, or rich—and all chic.

As to the women, they did very well. Some of them—Blanche, Leá de Horn and Louise Violaine—had come decolletée, but Gaga was the only one who was outrageously so, although at her age she would have looked much better had the contrary been the case. The supper was not very gay, and Georges thought he had been present on livelier occasions, among the Bourgeois at Orleans. There was very little conversation; the men who did not know each other looked askance; the women were quiet, and altogether the scene was a surprise to Georges.

CHAPTER VI.

A SUPPER PARTY.

THE fish was being served—a *Carpe du Rhin, à la Chambord*—when Blanche exclaimed aloud:

"Lucy, my dear, I met your Olivier, Sunday. How he has grown!"

"He is eighteen," answered Lucy, "which fact makes me pretty old. He left for school again yesterday."

Her son Olivier, of whom she spoke always with much pride, was being educated at the Naval School.

After this the conversation turned on children. All these ladies became quite tender and demonstrative. Nana said that her little son, her Louis, was now at his aunt's, who brought him to see her every morning at eleven, and she took him into her bed, where he played with Lulu, her great cat. It was the funniest thing in the world to see the two roll over and over, and hide in the coverings.

"I passed such a day yesterday!" began Rose Mignon, in her turn. "Just think of it. I went to see Charles and Henri at their boarding school, and nothing would do but I must take them to the theatre. They declared that they would see me play; and they jumped upon me like crazy things, clapping their hands."

Mignon smiled complacently with a mist in his eyes, of paternal tenderness.

"And, at the representation," he continued, "they were so droll—as solemn as little owls—watching Rose, and asking me why their mother wore skirts so short."

Everybody laughed, and Mignon felt that his triumph was complete—his pride as a father was highly gratified. He adored children, and had only one care, which was to increase their fortune by managing with infinite pains the money gleaned by Rose at the theatre and elsewhere. When he married her, he was the leader of the orchestra in the Café Concert, where she sang. At that time they loved each other passionately, now they were only very good

friends. Matters were arranged on a business footing between them; she worked with all her heart and soul, making the most of her talent and her beauty; while he had thrown aside his violin, that he might better watch over her success as a woman and an artist. Never was there a ménage more commonplace or more united.

"How old is the eldest?" asked Vandeuvres.

"Henri is nine," answered Mignon. "And a wild one."

Then, he attacked Steiner, who did not like children, and told him squarely, that if he had any, he would not spend his money in such a foolish way. He spoke to the Banker over his wife's shoulder, watching him closely all the time, to discover, if possible, on what terms he was with Nana. After a while he became annoyed at Rose and Fauchéry, who were talking very earnestly together. Why on earth did Rose waste her time in that way! and with his white hands, on the little finger of which sparkled a diamond, he cut another mouthful of filet.

The conversation on children continued. La Faloise was greatly disturbed by Gaga's vicinity. He asked her about her daughter, whom he had had the pleasure of seeing at the Variétés with her. Lilli was well, but she was so very childish. The young man was surprised when he heard that she was in her nineteenth year. Gaga became more and more imposing in his eyes, and he asked why she had not brought Lilli with her.

"Oh! no; that would never do!" she answered, with a shocked air. "It is not two months since she left her convent. I thought of marrying her at once. But she loves me so much that, entirely against my will, I yielded to her entreaties."

Her reddened eyelids, with their scanty lashes, quivered as she spoke of her daughter's establishment. She said that she had not been able to put by a sou; and that it was much better for a woman to marry early. She leaned toward La Faloise, who colored at the contact of this large shoulder covered thick with enamel.

"You know," she murmured, "that it will not be my fault if she does not do well."

There was a good deal of movement about the table.

the garçons were hurrying here and there. The Maître d'Hotel, who up to this time had only offered Meursault, now presented Chateau Latour and Léoville. Covered by the noise, Georges, much astonished, found an opportunity of asking Daguenet if all these ladies had children, and the latter was so amused at this question, that he gave a few particulars.

Lucy Stewart was the daughter of a man of English origin, an employé at the Northern Railway Station; she was thirty-nine, with a head like a horse, but withal very charming—consumptive, but likely to live for years. She was really the most chic of these ladies—three Princes and a Duke—

Caroline Héquet was born at Bordeaux; her father was a clerk who had died of shame; her mother was a woman of brains, who, notwithstanding the fact that he had cursed her when he learned of her disgrace, was adroit enough to induce him to overlook her fault. The daughter was twenty-five, cold in character and appearance, but was regarded everywhere as beautiful. The mamma was very orderly; she kept her books with her receipts and expenses, managing the whole house from the small apartment which she occupied on the second floor in La Rue François 1st, and where she carried on a dress-making establishment.

As to Blanche de Sévry—her real name was Jacqueline Bandu—she came from a village near Amiens; she was a wonderful personage, never speaking the truth under any circumstances—calling herself the granddaughter of a General, and declared she was not thirty-two—greatly admired by the Russians on account of her embonpoint. Then, Daguenet rapidly ran over the others. Clarisse Besnus, who began her career as a servant with a lady whose husband had launched her; Simonne Cabroche, daughter of a furniture-dealer in the Faubourg Saint Antoine, educated to become a teacher; Maria Blond, Louise Violaine, and Léa de Horn, had all grown up in the streets of Paris. Then there was Tatan Néné, who had kept cows in the country until she was twenty.

excited, and astonished at this rough description given close in his ear, with indescribable coarseness of words, while all the time the waiters repeated in respectful voices:

"*Poulardes a la Maréchale—Filets de soles, Sauce ravigote.*"

"My dear boy," said Daguenet, with an air of importance, "don't touch that fish, it is good for nothing at this season. And take my advice, content yourself with the Léoville: it is less treacherous."

Thirty-eight people were gasping for air around this table and under these candelabra. The waiters ran here and there, dropping grease on the carpet which had not been lifted. But the supper was not gay. The ladies ate little, sending their plates away almost untouched. Tatan Néné was the only one among them who seemed to enjoy what she ate. At this late hour of the night, there was little appetite, only a capricious fancy.

The elderly gentleman at Nana's side refused every dish He had taken nothing but a spoonful of potatoes, and looked down in silence upon his empty plate. Discreet yawns were indulged in, and heavy eyelids fell, while faces whitened with fatigue. The fact was that these suppers could not be amusing if they were proper. It remained to be seen what effect Champagne would have. Bordenave was the only person who kept the party stirring. He sat with his leg comfortably supported in another chair, and allowed himself, with the air of a Sultan, to be waited upon by his two neighbors—Lucy and Rose.

They occupied themselves exclusively with him, and watched his glass and his plate, which devotion by no means silenced his complaints.

"Who intends to cut my meat for me?" he asked, "the table is a mile away and I can't do it!"

Thereupon Simonne rose, and leaning over him cut his meat for him. All the women were deeply interested in what he ate, and offered him the dishes which they took from the hands of the garçons.

Simonne wiped his mouth, while Rose and Lucy changed his plate. He thought this very nice, and at last condescended to express himself as somewhat pleased.

"Yes, that is right, my good girl. A woman is made for just such purposes!"

The conversation became general. *Sorbets aux Mandarins* was served. The hot *rôti* was *a fillet aux truffes*, and the cold dish a *galantine a la gelée*.

Nana was vexed at the dulness of her guests, and began to talk very loud.

"You know that the Prince d'Ecosse has already engaged a stage-box for 'The Blonde Venus' for the time that he is here during the Exposition."

"I trust that all the Princes will call on us," muttered Bordenave, with his mouth full.

"The Shah of Persia comes Sunday," said Nana.

Then Lucy Stewart spoke of the Shah's diamonds. It seemed that he wore a tunic entirely covered with precious stones which represented millions. And these ladies, with a gleam of cupidity in their eyes, leaned forward eagerly and talked of Emperors and Kings who were expected. Every one dreamed of some royal caprice and a fortune.

"Tell me, my dear," said Caroline Héquet to Vandeuvres, "how old is the Emperor of Russia?"

"Oh! he has no age at all!" answered the Count, laughing. "I warn you, that you have nothing to expect there!"

Nana drew herself up and looked offended. She would not sanction such rudeness at her table. But Blanche interposed, and spoke of the King of Italy, whom she had once seen at Milan. He was not handsome, but all the women liked him, and she looked quite disturbed when Victor Fauchéry told her that Victor Emmanuel would not probably come. Louise Violaine and Leá de Horn were very curious about the Emperor of Austria. Suddenly little Maria Blond spoke up:

"The King of Prussia is an old idiot! I was at Baden-Baden last year, and he was never seen except with Count Bismarck."

"Bismarck! Oh! I knew him," interrupted Simonne. "A most charming man he is, too!"

"That was precisely what I was saying yesterday!" cried Vandeuvres; "but no one would believe me."

And, as at the Comtesse Sabine's, there was a long discussion in regard to Monsieur de Bismarck.

Vandeuvres used the very same words and phrases, and one might have believed one's self still in the Muffat salon; the ladies only were changed.

Precisely too, as on the previous evening, there was a talk about music. Then, Foucarmont having let drop a word or two, about the taking of the veil, in regard to which all Paris was gossiping, Nana became quite interested and insisted on hearing every detail about Mademoiselle de Fougeray.

"Oh! poor little soul—to bury her alive!" The women about the table were much touched, and Georges, wearied at hearing all this a second time, cross-examined Daguenet as to Nana's daily life: when alas! the conversation came back with strange persistency to the Comte de Bismarck.

Tatan Néné leaned toward Labordette, to question him in a whisper, as to whom this Bismarck might be. She knew nothing of him, she said. Then Labordette, with cool deliberation, began to tell her the most preposterous tales; this Bismarck ate raw meat; he regarded every woman as his lawful prey, and had thirty-two children, he being a man of forty.

"Forty years old and thirty-two children!" cried Tatan Néné, in utter stupefaction. "I never heard of such a thing!"

The shout of laughter which ran around the table showed her that she was the subject of a joke.

"How stupid you are!" she murmured. "Now how am I to know when you are in jest!"

Meanwhile Gaga had got no farther than the Exposition. Like all the other ladies, she was full of joyous expectation. If Paris were full of strangers, she might hope after the Exposition to retire to Juvisy and live in a pretty house, on which she had had her eye for a long time.

Gaga became quite sentimental as she glanced at the young man at her side. La Faloise was evidently interested in her; she wondered if he had money. He asked for her address, which she gave with an affectation of timidity.

"Look!" whispered Vandeuvres to Clarisse; "I actually believe that Gaga has made a conquest of your Hector!"

"I dare say," answered the actress. "That boy is a fool! I have dismissed him from my house at least three times. When young fellows like that give themselves the airs of old men, I am disgusted!"

She interrupted herself and nodded toward Blanche, who, ever since dinner began, had held herself in a most uncomfortable position, that the distinguished but elderly stranger might have a good opportunity of admiring her neck and shoulders.

"Look out, my friend!" said Clarisse, "it looks to me as if you were about to be left in the lurch, too!"

Vandeuvres smiled faintly and shrugged his shoulders with an air of indifference. He was not the man, he said, to prevent poor Blanche from having a success!

The spectacle offered by Steiner to the whole table interested him more. The Banker was celebrated for the earnestness with which he threw himself into his love affairs; this terrible German Jew—this man through whose hands millions daily passed, became absolutely imbecile at such times. Never did a new actress appear on the boards of the theatres, if she were in the least pretty, that he did not pay his court to her. Enormous sums were cited that he had thus lavished. Twice he had been nearly ruined. As Vandeuvres said, they paid a tribute to morality by emptying his strong boxes.

A successful operation in the salt mines of the Landes had restored to him all his prestige at the Bourse, and Mignon for six weeks followed his example, but the tidbits were gone, and Mignon got only empty husks for his pains.

Nana's white teeth glistened. Once again was Steiner's blood stirred, and so carried away was he, that he sat next Nana as if stupefied. He did not eat, nor did he speak. His face was pale, but marbled with red spots. She had only to name a sum, but she was in no haste. She played with him, whispered occasionally in his ear, and seemed to find great amusement in watching him. It would be quite time to turn her attention more entirely in this direction if Comte Muffat persisted in playing Joseph.

"Léoville or Chambertin?" murmured a waiter, putting his head between Steiner and Nana, just as the Banker was saying something in a low voice.

"What! I don't know! Whichever you please," stammered the Banker, in utter confusion.

Vandeuvres thought this very droll. He touched Lucy Stewart, who had a very wicked tongue, and cared little what she said when she was fairly started.

Steiner had that evening exasperated Lucy. She sneered:

"It is the Jonquier affair over again! You remember Jonquier, who was so intimate with Rose, don't you? Well, Mignon managed that, and when the fancy was over he took the Banker back to Rose just as if he had been a repentant husband. But this time it won't be so easy, for Nana is not the woman to give up the men that are lent to her."

"But what is going on now?" asked Vandeuvres.

"Just look at the way Mignon is glaring at his wife!"

He leaned forward and saw Rose devoting herself to Fauchéry, which fully explained Lucy Stewart's anger. He laughed.

"The deuce take it!" he exclaimed. "Are you jealous?"

"Jealous!" answered Lucy, in a rage. "Do you think that if Rose wants Léon, that I am not ready to give him to her? What is he worth? A bouquet a week, that is all! These actresses are all alike. Rose raved when she read Léon's article on Nana. I know it, I tell you! Then, of course, it was necessary that she should have an article, and she has got it."

She checked herself, and said to a garçon who stood behind her with a bottle in each hand:

"Chambertin."

Then she began again, lowering her voice:

"I don't propose to make a row—it is not my way, but if I were her husband I would settle her pretty quickly. The idea of her making such a dead set at Fauchéry! Little does she know about him. He hangs on to women merely to make his own position! A nice set of people this!"

Vandeuvres tried to calm her.

Bordenave at this moment, temporarily deserted by Rose and by Lucy, fell into a rage, and declared that they

intended to let him die of hunger and thirst. This made people laugh. No one eat anything now. The dessert was on the table, and merely trifled with; but the Champagne had loosened their tongues, and the women leaned their arms on the table, while the men, in order to be more at ease, threw themselves back in their chairs, and the long line of guests was thus broken. It was very warm in the room, and the air was so heavy that even the candles did not burn well. Occasionally, when a head was quickly turned, a diamond ear-ring flashed; other things caught the light: laughing eyes, white teeth, and the reflection of the candelabra on a glass of champagne. Questions were asked to which no one waited for replies; the guests called from one end of the table to the other; there was loud laughter and much gesticulation. But it was the garçons who made the most noise. They seemed to think themselves in the corridors of their restaurant, and served the dessert with many guttural exclamations.

"My children!" cried Bordenave, "remember that you have to play to-morrow. Look out and don't take too much Champagne."

"I have drank all known liquids," said Foucarmont, "in the five quarters of the globe. The most wonderful wines, and the most extraordinary combinations of flavors, alcohols that ought to kill a man, but they never did anything to me. I was never intoxicated. I have tried to be, but it was of no use; I cannot."

He was very pale, and sat well back in his chair as he emptied glass after glass.

"No matter!" murmured Louise Violaine, "don't drink any more; you have had enough. I don't want to take care of you the rest of the night."

Two waiters were making the rounds of the table with the Champagne. Lucy Stewart's cheeks wore the peculiar hectic flush common to consumptives, while Rose Mignon's eyes floated in a tender mist. Tatan Néné was conscious that she had eaten too much, and was smiling vaguely at her folly. The other women were all talking together, telling their private affairs—a quarrel with a coachman, a projected excursion to the country, and some complicated tales of lovers, stolen or borrowed. But a

young man next Georges, having taken it into his head to embrace Léa de Horn, received an energetic slap with a "Let me alone, if you please!" full of superb indignation; and Georges, very tipsy and much excited, hesitated a little before executing an idea that was slowly ripening in his mind —which was to get down on the floor, crawl like a little dog on four paws, and lie down at Nana's feet. No one would see him, and he would be perfectly quiet. Daguenet having told the young man at Léa's side to be quiet, Georges felt as if he himself had been scolded: it was really too bad, and big tears came to his eyes. Daguenet laughed at him a little, bade him swallow some water, and asked him how he was to get on in the world, if three glasses of Champagne upset him in this way.

"At Havana," said Foucarmont, in a loud voice, "there was a brandy made from wild Bay that is like fire. Well! one evening I drank more than a quart; it did not do anything to me; and more than that, on another occasion, on the shores of Coramandel, the savages gave us a mixture of red pepper and vitriol—it did not affect me. No; it is no use, I cannot get tipsy!"

He had all at once taken a dislike to the face of La Faloise, who sat opposite him. He sneered and uttered a few disagreeable words. La Faloise, whose head was dizzy, was restless, and sat very close to Gaga. He was looking for his handkerchief, somebody had taken his handkerchief, which he demanded with the persistency of a drunken man, asking every one, and looking on the floor. When Gaga sought to soothe him, he murmured:

"But it is too provoking. My initials and a coronet are in the corner. It may be most compromising."

"It is indeed too bad, Monsieur Falamoise—Lamafoise —Mafaloise!" cried Foucarmont, thinking it very witty to thus distort the young man's name.

But La Faloise did not see the wit. He blustered and talked of his ancestors, and threatened to throw a carafe at Foucarmont's head. The Count de Vandeuvres interfered and told La Faloise that Foucarmont was a privileged jester. Everybody laughed, which so disturbed La Faloise that he seated himself and ate his bread with the meek obedience of a child when his cousin bade him do so

Gaga drew her chair close to his, but he continued to look anxiously around, and at intervals asked for his handkerchief. Then Foucarmont turned his attention and his wit toward Labordette across the table. Louise Violaine tried to make him hold his tongue, because, when he had been tormenting other people in this way, it was always the worse for her. He insisted on calling Labordette "Madame," which he seemed to think very brilliant. He repeated it over and over again, while Labordette shrugged his shoulders and said:

"You had better be quiet. That is a very stupid thing to say."

As Foucarmont continued, and arrived at insults without any one knowing why, he ceased to notice him, but addressing the Count, said:

"Will you, sir, induce your friend to be quiet? I do not wish to quarrel."

Everybody felt that he was in the right, but that was no reason why the entertainment should be spoiled. Vandeuvres insisted on his friend addressing Labordette as "Sir," instead of "Madame," and the other men, Mignon, Steiner, and Bordenave interfered, all talking loudly and together.

The elderly gentleman at Nana's side alone was silent and dignified. On his lips was the same weary little smile he had worn all the evening.

"My dear," said Bordenave, "shall we not take our coffee here? We are very comfortable."

Nana did not instantly reply. She had not seemed to herself to be at home. Everybody called the waiters and was as much at ease as if at a restaurant, while she, the mistress of the house, devoted herself to stout little Steiner, who was choking with apoplexy at her side. She listened to his whispers and shook her head provokingly. The Champagne she had taken, had called a brighter color to her cheeks, her eyes were more sparkling than ever, and the Banker lost his head. When she turned her throat he saw near her ear a reflection like satin, which drove him mad. Apparently they fancied themselves alone for a moment or two, but Nana quickly recovered herself and sank into deep thought. She looked about her and tried to be

amiable; tried to let her guests know that she knew how to receive. Toward the end of the supper, she was really intoxicated, but sober enough to know it and to be vexed thereat. It was too stupid; Champagne always intoxicated her at once. She was angry, moreover, at the idea that these people thought they could behave as they pleased at Nana's table. She knew this very well, for she had seen them whispering to each other; but they should see. If she were a little tipsy, she was more chic and had more idea of propriety than any of the others.

"My dear little girl," resumed Bordenave, "why can't we have our coffee here? I should prefer it on account of my leg—"

But Nana rose abruptly, and pushing back her chair said to Steiner, and to the elderly gentleman, who were both utterly confounded:

"Upon my word, I have had a lesson. I shall know whom to invite in future."

Then, with a wave of her hand toward the door of the dining-room, she said more audibly:

"You know very well that if you want coffee, you will find it there!"

There was a great noise of chairs, and the party left the table laughing and talking as they went. No one noticed Nana's anger, and in the salon only Bordenave was left, who crept along by the side of the wall, swearing at these women, who, he said, had drank so much that they had forgotten him. The garçons were clearing the table regardless of the fact that he was still in the room, and the Maître d'Hotel giving his orders in a very audible voice. They banged about, rattled the dishes, and under their rapid movements the table soon disappeared like a decoration in a fairy pantomime at the whistle of a skilled machinist. The ladies and the gentlemen were to return to the salon after they had taken their coffee.

"Bless me!" said Gaga, with a little shiver as she entered the dining-room, "it is much colder here."

The window was open.

Two lamps were on the table where coffee was served with liqueurs. There were no chairs, and they stood as they drank their coffee, while the noise made by the waiters

seemed to increase rather than diminish. Nana had disappeared. But no one was disturbed by her absence. They did just as well without her; they helped themselves; opened the drawers of the buffet to find some teaspoons; several groups formed, and those persons who had been furthest apart at the table now joined each other; looks and whispers were exchanged.

Rose turned to her husband. "Auguste," she said, "must not Monsieur Fauchéry come and breakfast with us one of these days?"

Mignon, who was playing with his watch chain, looked at the Journalist for a moment and smiled with a very hateful expression. Rose was certainly quite mad and he meant to put an end to this nonsense. An article was a very good thing, certainly, but after that, the door should be closed. But, as he knew how headstrong was his wife, he thought it best to pretend blindness for the moment, so he answered with an attempt at amiability:

"Certainly, I shall be most happy. Come to-morrow, Monsieur Fauchéry."

Lucy Stewart, who was talking with Steiner and Blanche, heard this invitation; she raised her voice, saying to the Banker:

"They are all alike. One of them stole my dog. Is it my fault if you drop her?"

Rose looked around, still drinking her coffee slowly. She looked at Steiner, and all the concentrated anger she felt at his desertion blazed in her eyes. She saw things more clearly than her husband did; Mignon was a simpleton to try the same game again that he had carried out with Jonquier; it would not succeed a second time. So much the worse—she would have Fauchéry all the same, and if Mignon were not content, well and good: she would teach him a lesson.

"You don't propose to fight—you two—do you?" said Vandeuvres to Lucy Stewart.

"No, don't be afraid; only she had better keep quiet or she will get herself into trouble."

And, summoning Fauchéry with an imperious gesture, she said:

"I have your slippers in my house. I will send them to your concierge to-morrow."

He took these words as a jest, apparently. She turned away with the air of an offended Queen. Clarisse, who was leaning against the wall calmly drinking a tiny glass of kirsch, shrugged her shoulders.

What a commotion about a man! How was it that no sooner did two women get together with their lovers than their first idea was to quarrel? At the same time she was quite ready to tear out Gaga's eyes on Hector's account. Then as La Faloise passed her:

"Listen a moment," she said, "you like them more than ripe, it seems. Very mellow they must be to suit you."

La Faloise looked much vexed, and all at once seeing that Clarisse was laughing at him, his suspicions were aroused.

"Stop all this nonsense," he said; "you have taken my handkerchief; give it back to me!"

"What a nuisance you are with your handkerchief!" she cried. "Why on earth should I have taken it?"

"Why should you have taken it? To send it to my family and get me into trouble," was his reply.

In the meantime Foucarmont attacked the liqueurs. He sneered audibly each time that his eyes fell on Labordette drinking his coffee, surrounded by all these ladies, and he uttered little disjointed phrases: "the son of a horse-jockey! the illegitimate son of a Countess!" All at once he tossed down a glass of Chartreuse, and exclaimed, "I must slap his face!"

Chartreuse had never before affected him, but suddenly, as he advanced upon Labordette, he turned deadly pale, and fell before the buffet an inert mass. He was dead-drunk. Louise Violaine was in despair: she said mournfully that she knew all the time how it would end, and now she would have to take care of him. Gaga in the meantime comforted her, and examined Foucarmont with the eyes of experience, telling her that it was nothing—that he would sleep like that twelve or fifteen hours, and be none the worse for it. Foucarmont was carried out, and Louise Violaine followed.

CHAPTER VII.

NANA IN DESPAIR.

"BUT where is Nana?" asked Vandeuvres, suddenly. She had disappeared as soon as they left the table, and everybody remembered this and became quite clamorous. Steiner was very uneasy and questioned Vandeuvres in regard to the stranger, who had also disappeared; but the Count swore that the elderly gentleman had gone first, and that he was to leave France the very next day. He was a foreigner, whose name it was not advisable to give—a very rich man who was willing to pay for an unlimited number of suppers and dinners. Then, as Nana was again forgotten, Daguenet slipped out of the salon, looked through a door, and then hastily summoned Vandeuvres by a sign. In the bed-room they found the mistress of the house seated stiff and erect upon a chair, her lips white and trembling, while Daguenet and Georges stood and looked at her in silent consternation.

"What is the matter?" he asked, in surprise.

She did not answer, nor did she turn her head. He repeated his question.

"I do not choose to be insulted," she exclaimed, finally, and then words flowed from her mouth. She was not a creature to be trodden under foot! All her guests had joined together at supper to show that they despised her. She did not know what prevented her from turning all these beastly people out of doors; and she burst into a paroxysm of sobs.

"Come, my girl, you are intoxicated," said Vandeuvres, gently, "you must be reasonable."

"I dare say," she answered. "Very likely tipsy I am, but all the same I choose to be respected."

For fifteen minutes Daguenet and Georges vainly implored her to return to her guests. She grew more and more angry, declared they could do what they pleased

she despised them too much ever to see them again. No, she would not leave her room.

"I ought to have known it," she resumed. "It is Rose Mignon who has managed this whole dastardly plot! There was one good, honest woman who promised to sup with me to-night, and it was Rose, of course, who prevented her coming."

She spoke of Madame Robert. Vandeuvres assured her on his honor that Madame Robert had refused of herself. He listened to Nana's complaints without a smile; he was accustomed to such scenes, and knew just what to do with women when he found them in this state. But when he took her hands and tried to raise her from her chair, she struggled and became furiously angry. She was certain, she said, that it was that serpent Fauchéry who had prevented Comte Muffat from coming. Fauchéry was a man who was quite capable of doing his best to destroy a woman's happiness. She knew very well that the Comte had a passion for her.

"He, my dear, never!" cried Vandeuvres, forgetting himself and laughing.

"Why not, pray?" she asked, a little sobered.

"Because he is priest-ridden, and were he to touch you with the end of his little finger, he would go and confess his sin to-morrow. Listen to some good advice. Don't let the other escape."

She was silent for a moment, and then rose and bathed her eyes in front of her mirror, dipping her handkerchief in a glass of water. But when they urged her to go back to the salon she refused with hot indignation. Vandeuvres, in the meantime, left the room without further entreaties, and as soon as he had gone she threw herself into Daguenet's arms, saying over and over again:

"Ah! my darling, I love you, and only you! You are worth them all put together! If we could only live always like this! How wretched we women are!"

Then seeing that Georges was greatly embarrassed by this exhibition of tenderness, she rushed to him and embraced him also. Daguenet could not be jealous of a child. She wanted him and Georges to be always on the best of terms, because it would be so nice to live all three together. Sud

deadly her attention was attracted by a singular noise. They explored, and found Bordenave, who, after taking his coffee, had come into this room to establish himself comfortably. He slept on two chairs, with his head on the edge of the bed and his leg well protected.

Nana thought him so very droll, with his mouth wide open and his nose moving at each snore, that she burst out laughing, and ran from her room to the salon followed by Georges and Daguenet.

"Oh! my dear," she cried, throwing herself almost into Rose Mignon's arms, "just come and see this!"

All the women were compelled to follow her. She took their hands with caresses, and led them into the bed-room almost by force, laughing so gayly and frankly that the others were forced to do the same. They stood with breath suspended, watching Bordenave majestically extended.

The laughs burst out as soon as they regained the salon, where, when they were all quiet and listened, they could hear Bordenave snore.

It was nearly four o'clock. In the dining-room a card-table had been hastily arranged, around which sat Vandeuvres, Steiner, Mignon and Labordette. Behind this table stood Lucy and Caroline talking, while Blanche, deadly sleepy and cross, asked Vandeuvres every five minutes if they were never going. In the salon they tried to dance. Daguenet sat at the piano.

"Nothing noisy," said Nana, and he consequently then played waltzes and polkas. But the dance was not gay, and some of the ladies talked a little apart among themselves. Suddenly there was a new arrival. Eleven young men, coming in together, were laughing loudly in the anteroom. They had come from the Ministerial Ball, in their black coats and white gloves, and Nana, indignant at this noisy, unceremonious entrance, called to the Maître d'Hôtel and the garçons in the kitchen to put these gentlemen out, saying that she did not know them, and had never seen them. Fauchéry, Labordette and Daguenet all went forward to insist on proper respect being paid to the mistress of the house. Violent words were uttered and a general interchange of blows was anticipated. Finally a little fellow made himself heard, and said:

"Now, Nana, did you not invite us yourself the other night at Péter's, in the red salon? Just try and remember."

The other evening at Péter's? She did not remember. What evening? and when the little man told her the day, Tuesday—she recalled having supped there on that Tuesday, but she was sure she had invited no one.

"It looks to me though, my dear," murmured Labordette, who had begun to doubt, "very much as if you had done so. You had been taking a little Champagne, possibly."

Then Nana laughed. It was quite possible, she admitted. At all events, as these gentlemen were there, they might as well stay. All was amicably arranged, and the new-comers found friends in the salon, and the esclandre was smoothed over. The little fair man, the spokesman, bore one of the greatest names in France. He said more men were coming from the ball, as was the case, for they began to pour in, in irreproachable evening costume.

Fauchéry asked, jestingly, if the Minister himself was not coming. But Nana was vexed, and turned away. She did not choose to say that she had a certain hope, which was that Comte Muffat would come in among some of these men, and as she talked with Rose and Caroline, she watched the door.

The clock struck five—the dancing had ceased—the card-players, however, had not left the table, though Labordette had exchanged with some one. The sleepiness of long watching paled their faces—the atmosphere was heavy—the lamps burned unsteadily, and the blackened wicks showed through the globes. The ladies were in that state of vague melancholy when they felt it needful to relate their several histories. Blanche de Sévry spoke of her grandfather—the General—while Clarisse repeated her romance—and each shrugged her shoulders, and wondered how the other dared to invent such nonsense. Lucy Stewart spoke frankly of her humble origin and of her youth, when her father regaled her on Sundays with a *chausson aux pommes*.

"Oh! let me tell you a story!" cried little Maria Blond, suddenly. "You know I live in La Rue Monlir. Well!

opposite me lives a gentleman—a Russian, I think—at all events, a man who is frightfully rich. Well—yesterday I received a basket of fruit. Such a basket! The most enormous peaches—and grapes as large as that! Something wonderful at this season—and in the middle six notes for a thousand francs. It was the Russian. You understand. I sent them all back to him; but I admit that I did it reluctantly, and that I was dying to keep it, particularly the fruit!"

The ladies looked at each other with compressed lips. Little Maria Blond had a lively imagination for her years! And they all despised each other, but were especially jealous of Lucy and her three Princes. She had made herself conspicuous formerly, by riding in the Bois on horseback, and had, so to speak, started in life in that way; whereupon all these women followed her example, but not with the same success.

They now talked about horses.

"I like a good carriage better," said Nana, still looking at the door, but with hope gradually dying away.

It was now daybreak. Everybody was tired out. Rose Mignon had refused to sing the *Pautoufle*. She was curled up on a sofa talking to Fauchéry in a low voice, and watching Mignon, who had just won some fifty Louis from Vandeuvres.

A stout gentleman, wearing a decoration, and looking very solemn, had recited the Sacrifice of Abraham in the patois of Alsace; but the delicate humor of this morceau was not appreciated, and every one wondered if the night could not be finished with some wild gayety.

Labordette attacked La Faloise again, who was still bent on finding his handkerchief. He denounced several of the women, and told him to search first one and then another; and the poor youth wandered about the picture of despair.

The young men, seeing the Champagne on the buffet, began to drink. They made a great noise, and became quite excited; but a melancholy intoxication—a most deplorable stupidity—pervaded the salon. Then one young man—the heir of one of the noblest names in France—in despair at not being able to think of anything funny,

took a bottle of Champagne, and poured it down the piano. All the others were convulsed with merriment.

"But why," asked Tatan Néné, in astonishment, having watched this proceeding; "but why does he put Champagne in the piano?"

"Can it be possible, my child, that you don't know?" answered Labordette, gravely. "There is nothing so good for pianos as Champagne. It gives them tone."

"Ah!" murmured Tatan Néné, quite convinced; and then she became angry when she heard them all laughing. "How was she to know?"

This festive occasion threatened to wind up most disastrously. In a corner Maria Blond and Léa de Horn were having a hot dispute, in which they indulged in many personalities in regard to face and figure. Lucy bade them both be quiet. She was not pretty, as they well knew, and the face signified very little—to be well made was everything. She would not have given her figure for any one of those dolls' heads.

At the end of the salon on a sofa sat an attaché of one of the Embassies. He had put his arm around Simonne's waist. She, not in the most amiable manner, pushed him away, and struck him with a fan. Gaga had pinned La Faloise into a corner, and Clarisse was obscured from view by two assiduous youths.

At the piano the same original game was kept up. Each one of the young men insisted on pouring in a portion of his bottle. It was a simple and well-bred amusement!

"Now, good fellow, have another drink? Heavens and earth! How thirsty this piano is!"

Nana, with her back turned, saw nothing of all this, she was occupied with Steiner, who sat as closely to her as possible. In her robe of white foulard, as light and soft as swan's down, pale and weary, with down-cast eyes, she looked sweet and kind. The roses in her hair and on her corsage had fallen, only three stems were left. Steiner hastily drew his hand back, for he had touched one of the pins which had been placed in her dress by Daguenet and Georges. Several drops of blood appeared, one fell on her dress and stained it.

"That is a very bad sign," said Nana, seriously.

It was now daybreak; a dull light, ineffably sad, came in at the windows, and the guests began to depart. Caroline Héquet, indignant at having wasted her night, said it was quite time to go away. Rose made a little face, but agreed; and Mignon having cleaned out Vandeuvres, Rose and he left without troubling themselves about Steiner, but having recalled to Fauchéry's memory their invitation for the next morning. But Lucy Stewart, who went away at the same time, told him in direct terms that she never wished to see him again. Rose turned and muttered an offensive sentence between her breath. Fortunately Mignon, who was very paternal when women quarrelled, as well as experienced and superior, pushed Rose out and begged her to say no more. Lucy having recovered her dignity descended the stairs after them. Gaga took La Faloise off, he, sick and dizzy, sobbing like a child because he could not find Clarisse, who had long since disappeared with the two young men. Simonne, too, was not to be found. Leá de Horn, Tatan Néné, and Maria Blond remained in the salon, Labordette having declared that he would take care of them.

"I am not sleepy," said Nana. "Can't we do something?"

She looked at the sky through the glass, it was pale and livid, while over it hurried dark clouds. The clock struck five. Opposite on the other side of the Boulevard Haussmann the houses were still asleep, and their damp roofs stood out against the sky, while in the deserted street a band of sweeps passed along with their clattering wooden shoes. As she looked at this muddy, dreary scene, Nana was suddenly seized by a longing for the country, for something fresh and green.

"Come here," she said to Steiner. "I want you to take me to the Bois and we will drink milk there."

She clapped her hands with childish glee. Without waiting for the Banker's reply, who consented of course, but at the same time none too well pleased, she ran to throw a wrap over her shoulders. The witty youths were still hovering about the piano. They could find nothing more to throw into it, so began to talk of going away, when one

of them suddenly appeared with a bottle of Chartreuse which he brought from the office.

"Wait a moment!" he said. "Here is some Chartreuse; he wanted Chartreuse and we will give it to him!" And he solemnly poured it into the piano!

"And now, boys, let us be off! I have a very strong conviction that we have been idiots!"

Nana awakened Zoé, who was asleep on a chair in her dressing-room. The gas was burning and the woman shivered as she assisted her mistress to put on her cloak and hat. In a burst of confidence and in her relief at having come to a decision, Nana said to her:

"Well, Zoé, I have done as you advised. I have taken the Banker: he is as good, I suppose, as any one else."

Zoé was sulky and half torpid. She grumbled out that Madame might better have decided on that the first day. Then, as she followed her into the next room, she asked what she was to do with those two men. Bordenave was still snoring, and Georges had thrown himself on the bed and was sound asleep. Nana said, with a laugh:

"Oh! let them alone. Let them sleep as long as they will!"

But she became suddenly serious as she saw Daguenet come in. He had been waiting in the kitchen, probably, and looked very sad.

"Now, dear, be reasonable," she said, as she put her arms around him, and kissing him tenderly. "There is nothing changed; you know that I adore you; but this cannot be helped. Come to-morrow and we will arrange matters. Now kiss me as if you loved me! Again! Again!"

And she ran off to join Steiner, elated at her idea of a drive and the fresh milk.

The Comte de Vandeuvres was still alone with the man who had recited The Sacrifice of Abraham.

They seemed to be nailed to the card table, unconscious of where they were or that it was broad daylight: while Blanche had thrown herself on the sofa and had fallen asleep.

"Ah! Blanche must come with us," cried Nana. "Come,

my dear. You will find Vandeuvres here when we come back, you may be quite sure."

Blanche rose lazily. The full empurpled face of the Banker was contracted with indignation at the idea of taking this girl with them. But the two women were already on the stairs, one saying to the other:

"You know we must see the cow milked for us!"

CHAPTER VIII.

NANA'S DRESSING-ROOM.

IT was Saturday at the Variétés, and the thirty-first representation of the *Blonde Venus*. The first act was just over. In the Actors' Foyer, Simonne, in her costume of Blanchisseuse, was standing before the console surmounted by a mirror, between the two doors opening on the corridor that led to the boxes. She was alone, and carefully examining herself, rubbing in the cork on her eyes, while the two gas-burners poured down their light upon her head.

"Has he come?" asked Prullière, hurrying in, wearing his operatic General's uniform, his huge sword, enormous boots, and preposterous plumes.

"Whom do you mean?" asked Simonne, smiling into the mirror, that she might see her teeth.

"The Prince."

"I don't know. I have just come down. He ought to be here. He comes regularly enough."

Prullière went to the chimney which faced the console, wherein burned a coke fire, and over which were two more gas burners in full blast. He examined first the clock and then the barometer, which hung on either side, and then dropped into a huge well-cushioned arm-chair, the green velvet of which, having been exposed to the rough usage of four generations of actors, had lost its original hue. There he sat in the weary, patient attitude of actors accustomed to waiting for their calls.

Old Bosc now came in, wrapped in a cloak which he had worn for twenty years. He laid his crown upon the piano without saying a word, and dropped one corner of his cloak, which exposed to view, the red silk robe and the gold embroidery of the casaque. His hands trembled, and his full face was that of a drunkard, in spite of a certain air of respectability imparted by a white beard. As a blast of wind shook the windows, and hail rattled against them, he shrugged his shoulders with an air of disgust.

"What vile weather!" he grumbled.

Simonne and Prullière took no notice of him. The gas light fell on four or five pictures, all landscapes, and on a portrait of the actor Vernet. On a pedestal stood a bust of Potier, a former glory of the Variétés, with its empty eyes. Presently there was a great noise at the door, it was Fontan in his yellow costume.

"Now, then! good people!" he exclaimed, "don't you know that this is my birthday?"

"Is that so?" asked Simonne, going toward him with a smile, as if irresistibly attracted by his false nose and by his mouth, the size of which had been increased by adroit painting; "and your name is Achille?"

"Precisely, and I am going to tell Madame Bron to send up some Champagne."

A bell rang loudly, and when the sound ceased, a cry ran through the corridor. A little man, very pale but with a stentorian voice, put his head through the door, shouting:

"Stage set for second act!"

"Who cares!" said Prullière; "I want some Champagne."

"If I were you, I would sooner order it from the café," muttered old Bosc, who was half lying on a velvet settee with his head leaning against the wall.

But Simonne said they ought to patronize Madame Bron. She danced around Fontan in great delight—his goat's mask enchanted her.

"Oh! the dear Fontan!" she cried; "there is nothing like him."

The two doors of the Foyer leading to the corridor were wide open. Along the yellow wall, strongly lighted by a gas-burner which was not seen, black shadows were flitting: men in stage costumes, women with shawls wrapped around them, all the figurantes of the second act, in which occurred the dance at the Boule Noire. From the end of the corridor came the clatter of feet on the five stairs which led down to the stage. As Clarisse rushed by, Simonne called her; but she answered that she would be back in a minute. She presently returned, shivering in the thin tunic and gauze scarf of Iris.

"Zounds!" she exclaimed, "it is Greenland itself here, and I forgot my furs."

Then standing before the chimney, she said:

"The Prince has come!"

"Ah!" all the others exclaimed, curiously.

"Yes, that was what I was running for, I wanted to see him. He has the first box on the right, the same as on Thursday. And this is the third time he has been here in a week. Isn't this Nana lucky? I'll bet that he does not come again though!"

Simonne opened her mouth to speak, when her words were drowned by a repetition of the call.

"They seem to be in a hurry," said Simonne, calmly. "You know he never goes to her rooms, but he sends for her to come to his."

Then Fontan, who knew what had taken place at the first interview between Nana and the Prince, told the whole story to the two women, laughing heartily and dropping his voice as he gave certain details.

Old Bosc listened with sleepy indifference—he felt no interest in women, and caressed meanwhile a huge cat that was curled up on the settee, finally taking the creature into his arms. The animal stretched herself, and after rubbing against the long beard, repelled probably by the smell of alcohol, returned to the settee.

"All the same," he repeated, as Fontan finished his story. "I should order my Champagne from the Café!"

Another summons from the call-boy, a rush of footsteps, while through a door, left open, came the sound of hurried steps and a puff, so to speak, of music, and, as the door fell to, only the measured beat of the drums was heard.

Then came a sudden quiet in the *Foyer des Artistes* and a distant burst of applause from the audience. Simonne and Clarisse were still discussing Nana, who, they declared, was always late. Presently a head was thrust in at the door; it was Satin, wearing a hat and veil like a lady paying a visit, who, seeing that she had opened the wrong door, disappeared as abruptly as she had come.

"What does that mean?" murmured Prullière, who had seen the girl for a year haunting the Café des Variétés

And then Simonne told how Nana, having recognized Satin as an old school-friend, had induced Bordenave to take her up.

"Good-evening," said Fontan, shaking hands with Mignon and Fauchéry, who had just come in.

Old Bosc extended two fingers, while the two women embraced Mignon.

"Is it a good house?" asked Fauchéry.

"Oh! superb," answered Prullière.

"But is it not time for you to be on?" asked Mignon of the women.

"Not yet, not until the fourth scene," they answered; but Bosc rose with the instincts of an old actor just as the call-boy appeared.

"Monsieur Bosc—Mademoiselle Simonne," he shouted. Simonne threw a fur-lined cloak over her shoulders and hurried out. Bosc, without undue haste, picked up his crown which he adjusted to his head; then, a little unsteady on his feet and with his mantel trailing, he went out, muttering as if he had been most unnecessarily disturbed.

"You were very amiable in your last paper," said Fontan to Fauchéry, "only why do you say that all actors are so vain?"

"Yes," interposed Mignon, laying his two square hands with tremendous force on the Journalist's shoulder, "why do you say that?"

Prullière and Clarisse laughed. For some time the whole company had been amused by a comedy that was being played behind the scenes. Mignon, indignant at his wife's last caprice—vexed that this Fauchéry offered, as tribute to her charms, only an occasional newspaper notice, had taken it into his head to revenge himself, by overwhelming the Journalist with marks of tenderness. Each evening when he appeared, Mignon would slap him fiercely on the shoulder with pretended good nature, shake him and push him—Fauchéry, a dwarf by the side of this Colossus, was sore from head to foot, but accepted it all with forced smiles in order not to have a quarrel with the husband of his chère amie.

"It is an insult to Fontan!" continued Mignon, continuing the jest. "On guard, my boy! one, two, three!"

Poor Fauchéry! he was pale and sick with the force of the blow that he received full in the chest. After a few moments he recovered himself sufficiently to say with a feeble smile that Mignon had strong arms. Clarisse, with a wink, called the attention of the others to Rose, who, standing on the threshold, had witnessed this scene. She walked directly up to Fauchéry, and, as if she had not seen her husband, standing on tip-toe in her baby dress, she presented her forehead to be kissed.

"Good-evening, Baby," said Fauchéry, familiarly, as he kissed her.

Mignon did not appear to notice this kiss. Everybody kissed his wife at the theatre; but he laughed in rather a constrained way as he glanced at the Journalist, who, it was clear, would pay dearly for this bravado on the part of Rose.

The door from the corridor was constantly opening and shutting, filling the Foyer with the uproar of applause from the house.

Simonne came back.

"Bose had a tremendous success," she exclaimed. "The Prince was convulsed with laughter, and applauded as much as if he had been paid to do so. Do any of you know that tall man who was with him—a handsome fellow, dignified-looking, and with magnificent whiskers?"

"It is Comte Muffat," answered Fauchéry. "I know at least, that the Prince yesterday, when they were both with the Empress, invited him to dinner to-day, and has probably brought him to the theatre."

"Comte Muffat! We know his father, do we not, Auguste?" asked Rose, turning to her husband. "You know the Marquis de Chouard; he is the one to whom I went to sing. He is in the house, I saw him at the back of a box. He is an old sinner; if ever—"

Prullière, who had just arranged his plumes, here called out to her:

"Come on, Rose!"

She followed him on a quick run, without finishing her phrase. The concierge of the theatre passed her with an

enormous bouquet in her hands; Simonne asked with a laugh if it were for her, but the concierge gave a little jerk of her chin toward Nana's dressing-room. That Nana! Everybody laid flowers at her feet. Coming back Madame Bron gave a letter to Clarisse, who uttered a stifled oath. That abominable La Faloise again! Would he never understand that she meant to throw him over! And when she heard that the gentleman was waiting for her below she burst into a rage.

"Tell him that I will come down after the next act, and that I intend to slap his face!"

Fontan hurried after the woman.

"Madame Bron, listen! Listen to me, Madame Bron; bring up in the entr'acte six bottles of Champagne."

Here the call was again heard.

"Hurry! ladies and gentlemen. Hurry!"

"Yes, yes, I am coming," answered Fontan, a little bewildered, and galloping after Madame Bron he called out once more:

"Do you understand?—six bottles of Champagne in the Foyer. It is my birthday. I will settle with you."

Simonne and Clarisse flew off with a great rush and rattle of skirts. Then not a sound except the windows rattling in the gale. Barilliere, a "call-boy" at the theatre for thirty years, went up to Mignon and familiarly offered his snuff box. A pinch offered and accepted gave him a moment or two of repose in his constant peregrinations through the corridors, and up the stairs. Madame Nana as he called her, was always late and always would be, he thought, if she pleased.

"But, bless me!" he said; "here she comes! She must know that the Prince is here!"

And Nana appeared in the corridor wearing her fish-woman's dress, her arms and face powdered, and two patches of rouge high up under her eyes. She did not come in. She simply nodded to Fauchéry and Mignon as she passed.

Mignon hurried out to shake hands with her, and Nana swept royally on, followed by her dresser, who, close at her heels, was endeavoring to put in a last pin or two. Behind the dresser was Satin, with an air of affected ennui.

"And where is Steiner?" asked Mignon, suddenly.

"Monsieur Steiner went to Loiret," said Barillot. "I heard he went to buy a country-seat."

"Yes, I know; the country-seat he talked about to Nana."

Mignon was very grave. Steiner had promised Rose a Hôtel long before, but it was of no use to be angry with any one. Thoughtful but superior Mignon retreated from the fire-place. There was no one now in the Foyer but the Journalist and himself. Fauchéry, much fatigued, was stretched out in the huge arm-chair, and sat perfectly quiet, with half-closed eyes, paying little attention to the occasional penetrating glances directed to him by the other.

When they were alone Mignon ceased to indulge in his ferocious love-pats. What was the good if no one was there to enjoy them? He was too disinterested to amuse himself alone by the farce he played. Fauchéry, only too thankful for this brief respite, stretched his feet out languidly in front of the fire. Mignon lounged up and down the room, and finally planted himself before the bust of Potier on the pedestal, looked at it without seeing it, and then went to the window, where he gazed down on the narrow court-yard. The rain had ceased, and there was not a sound except the roar of the gas and the snapping of the coke. The stairs and the corridors seemed deserted: it was one of those occasions when the whole troupe was on the stage, leaving the Foyer empty.

All at once, Bordenave's hoarse voice was heard swearing about two figurantes, who he said were two fools. As he entered the room he saw Fauchéry and Mignon, and told them that the Prince had sent to say that he should like to see him during the entr'acte in his lôge.

He tried to calm himself, and passing his handkerchief over his face, said:

"I am now going to wait on His Highness!"

The curtain fell upon a long salvo of applause, the actors and actresses hastened to their dressing-rooms, while the machinists reset the stage. Clarisse and Simonne stood at the back busily talking.

"You need not be afraid," said Simonne, as she went off at the side. "I will relieve you of him."

During the act, they had, between their sentences, arranged a little plan. Clarisse preferred not to see La Faloise who had not been able to make up his mind to leave her for Gaga. It was better that Simonne should explain that a man can't hang on to a woman in that way.

Simonne, in her Blanchisseuse costume, wrapped closely in furs, went down the narrow winding stairs, and turned into those damp and dirty corridors which led to the lôge of the concierge. This lôge between the actors' staircase and that of the administration, was like a huge glass lantern in which the gas burned brilliantly. On a dish were piled letters and papers; on the table were enormous bouquets by the side of dirty plates, and an old waist of a dress, the buttonholes of which the concierge was repairing.

And, amid this disorder, several men of the world, faultlessly dressed, gloved, and with their opera-glasses in their hands, were sitting, patient and submissive, turning their heads quickly each time that Madame Bron came back with replies to their letters or messages.

She had just handed a letter to a young man, who tore it hastily open, and who turned pale as he saw the classic phrase so often read in the same place:

"Impossible, my dear—engaged."

La Faloise sat near the stove, determined, apparently, on passing the evening there, although he was evidently uneasy under the fixed glare of an old cat who, surrounded by her kittens, sat up stiffly and surveyed him.

"Is that you, Mademoiselle Simonne?" asked the concierge. "What can I do for you?"

Simonne begged her to send out La Faloise. But Madame Bron was in no haste to comply with this request. She had, under the staircase, a deep closet to which the figurantes came down between the acts for a drink, and as she had four or five there now, eager and thirsty, she lost her head and became confused. There was a gas-burner in this closet, and a zinc-covered table laden with bottles, as were the shelves in the rear. When this door was

opened, a smell of alcohol pervaded the loge, and mingled with the odor of cooking and the perfume of the flowers on the table.

"Now, then," said the concierge, when she had finished serving the figurantes, "is it that little dark fellow that you wish to see?"

"No, indeed," answered Simonne, "please attend and make no mistake; it is that thin fellow by the side of the stove, the one that your cat is watching."

And she led La Faloise into the vestibule, while the other gentlemen sat there and stifled, and the figurantes drank on the staircase with all the senseless merriment of tipsy creatures.

Above, Bordenave was on the stage swearing at the carpenters, who were slow and bungling. At last the stage was cleared, and Mignon, who had only been watching an opportunity to begin his attacks again upon Fauchéry, in the presence of the workmen, clutched the Journalist in his strong arms and carried him off, giving him a good shaking before he set him down, saying, as he did so:

"Those planks, my boy, came near falling on you, and crushing you to powder."

The machinists laughed vociferously, and Fauchéry turned deadly pale. With difficulty he restrained himself, while Mignon, with an air of the greatest good nature, gave him two or three pats on the shoulder, either one of which was nearly enough to break him in two.

"I must look out for you, my boy! If anything happened to you I should be in despair."

Presently there was a little buzz: "The Prince! the Prince!" and each turned to look at the door. At first only Bordenave's round shoulders could be seen, with his bull-neck, as he bowed and scraped obsequiously. Then the Prince appeared, tall, manly, and handsome, a fair beard and ruddy complexion, with an air of distinction in his carriage and square shoulders in his well-fitting coat. Behind him were Comte Muffat and the Marquis de Chouard. This corner of the theatre was dark, and this group was only one of many moving shadows.

To address this son of a Queen, this future heir of a [illegible] Bordenave had adopted a voice like that of an

exhibitor of a trained bear, a voice that was tremulous with feigned emotion.

"If your Royal Highness will condescend to come this way—your Highness will please take care here!"

But the Prince was in no haste. He, on the contrary, stood still to watch the machinists, who had just lowered a huge triangular piece of iron set thick with burners, which, when lighted, illuminated every nook and corner. Muffat, who had never before been in the coulisses of a theatre, was astonished and uneasy; he looked up high with almost a sensation of fear, and saw away up other and similar lights, like constellations, among the cross-timbers and side-scenes, suspended like enormous sheets hung up to dry.

"Look out!" cried a voice.

And the Prince repeated the words of warning himself to the Count. They were setting the stage for the third act—the Grotto of Mount Etna—all was haste but no confusion. One man was lighting the gas under the red glasses, which were to produce the effect of fire in Vulcan's forge.

"Your Highness is very good," said Bordenave. "The theatre is small, but we do what we can. Now, if your Highness will come this way—"

Comte Muffat was already in the corridor; the slope of the stage had astonished him, and he did not like the many glimpses he got of the subterranean regions, where gas was burning and dark figures moving about. Suddenly he stopped and looked at two little women, who were eagerly looking through the curtain; one of them, the taller of the two, was even bold enough to enlarge the hole with her fingers.

"I see him!" she exclaimed, breathlessly, "I see him!"

The Prince smiled, but the Manager was quite indignant. Comte Muffat took off his hat and wiped his brow. The heat and closeness, the combination of escaped gas and fresh varnish and paint, the suggestions of uncleanliness in dark corners, were almost unbearable. The sense of suffocation was greater in the corridor Mingled odors of toilette and soaps, vinegar, cologne and lavender floated down from the boxes. After having passed the

corner of the Foyer, where Fontan was quarrelling with Madame Bron, because she had brought up only four bottles of Champagne, the Comte looked up, away up the wall of the staircase, astonished at the heat and the light that fell on his head. Above there was a great confusion of voices, a continual opening and shutting of doors, and the Comte shivered as if he were looking upon a new and strange world.

"A theatre is a curious place," said the Marquis de Chouard, as much at ease as if he were at home.

Bordenave at last reached Nana's dressing-room. He turned the handle of the door, and slipping aside, said:

"If your Highness will enter—"

A cry of surprise was heard, and Nana was seen rushing behind a curtain, while her dresser stood bewildered, with a towel in her hand.

"Oh! it is abominable to come in like that!" cried Nana from her concealment. "Don't you see that you can't come in?"

Bordenave seemed quite displeased at this most inconsiderate conduct.

"Come out, my child!" he said. "It is no matter. His Royal Highness is here. Come—don't be silly."

And as she refused with a laugh, he added, in the most paternal tone:

"Good heavens! don't you suppose that these gentlemen well understand that you are dressing? He won't eat you—"

"I am not sure of that!" said the Prince, quietly.

Everybody laughed, and in that way paid his Highness a delicate compliment. It was very clever what he had said—really extremely witty. Nana did not reply.

Comte Muffat, with his face in a blaze, examined the room, which was square, low in the ceiling, and entirely hung with a stuff that was bright Havana brown in color. Curtains of the same hue partitioned off the lower end of the room. Two large windows opened on the court of the theatre, facing a leprous, damp wall, on which the lighted windows threw two yellow squares.

A great Psyche was faced by a washstand of white marble, covered with glass bottles and boxes for essences, oils and powders. The Comte went toward the Psyche

saw his own face, which was suffused, and his brow covered with fine beads of sweat. He dropped his eyes, and turning away, beheld the washstand full of soapy water, the little ivory utensils scattered about, and the wet sponges. He felt the same dizziness he had experienced in the Boulevard Haussman, on the occasion of his first visit to Nana.

The thick carpet of the lôge was like velvet under his feet; the gas burning above the washstand and Psyche, seemed to have set fire to his temples. He passed his hand over his brow, and went toward the window, where he dropped upon a chair, and thought vaguely of a bouquet of tuberoses, which had once withered in his room, and of which he nearly died. When tuberoses decay, they have almost an odor of humanity.

"Now hurry!" said Bordenave, thrusting his head behind the curtain in the most familiar way.

The Prince was listening complacently to the Marquis de Chouard, who had taken the hare's foot from the dressing-table, and explained how it was used. In one corner sat Satin, her Madonna-like face calmly contemplating these gentlemen, while Madame Tiby—the dresser—was taking a few stitches on the tunic that Venus was to wear.

Madame Tiby was one of those women with a face like parchment, whom no one remembered as any younger than she was then. She wore a black dress, and her flat bust was set thick with pins.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," said Nana, drawing the curtain aside; "but I was a little taken by surprise."

Everybody turned. She had hastily thrust herself into the light stage attire she was to wear. Her beautiful arms were bare, and she held the curtain in one fair hand, as if ready to drop it again at the smallest movement on the part of her guests.

"Yes, I was taken by surprise. I should never have dared," she stammered, pretending to be greatly confused—blushing and dropping her eyes.

"You are all right!" cried Bordenave. "Come on, I say!"

She still hesitated.

"I trust His Highness will forgive me for receiving him in this costume—"

"It is I, Madame, who should make excuses for being so importunate, but I could not resist my desire to offer you my congratulations."

She moved quietly forward as he spoke, and now, perfectly unembarrassed, spoke to each of these men in succession.

When she reached Comte Muffat she extended her hand to him as to a friend, and scolded him for not coming to her supper. His Highness deigned to say a few jesting words to Muffat, who shivered from having held in his own burning hand the cool fingers of this woman. The Comte had eaten and drank heavily, for the Prince was a great eater and immoderate drinker. The two men were in fact a little tipsy.

Muffat could not think of anything to say but to complain of the heat.

"How can you live in such an atmosphere?" he exclaimed.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Bordenave looked through a peep-hole—a Judas worthy of a convent. It was Fontan, followed by Prullière and Bosc, each with bottles of Champagne under his arm and hands full of glasses. He knocked, and called out that it was his birthday, and he would pay for the Champagne.

Nana consulted the Prince with a look. He answered that he did not wish to be in any one's way, and—

But without waiting for any permission, Fontan entered, repeating:

"I will pay for the Champagne, my dear, if you will drink it."

Suddenly he saw the Prince, whom he did not know to be there. He stopped short, and said with an air of exaggerated solemnity:

"King Dagobert is in the corridor, and asks if he may drink a glass with His Royal Highness."

The Prince smiled, and thought this an excellent joke. By this time the dressing-room was over-crowded. Satin and Madame Tiby stood at the back against the curtain. The men crowded around Nana. Fontan, Prullière and

Bosc had on the costumes they had worn in the second act. Prullière took off his immense plumed hat, as he could not have worn it in the room. Bosc, with his purple mantle and crown of gilded card-board, saluted the Prince as Royalty should salute the son of a powerful neighbor.

"I drink to your Highness," said old Bosc, grandly.

"To the Army!" added Prullière.

"To Venus!" shouted Fontan.

The Prince waited, holding his glass, and then bowed three times.

"Madame—General—Sire!"

And he drained the glass. Comte Muffat and the Marquis de Chouard imitated him.

These theatrical people enjoyed this farce—played with such utter gravity. Nana, forgetting her costume, fancied herself to be a grande dame—Venus herself—opening her apartment to her Ministers of State. At each phrase she dropped the words "Your Royal Highness" with the greatest reverence. No one smiled or even seemed to notice the strange combination of this real Prince, heir to a throne, drinking Champagne with a strolling actor.

Bordenave, quite carried away, dreamed of the money he would take if His Highness would only come in like that in the second act of "The Blonde Venus."

Fontan filled all their glasses again, and the same toasts were repeated:

"To His Highness!"

"To the Army!"

"To Venus!"

But Nana raised her glass, and cried:

"No! No! To Fontan. It is his birthday. Let us drink to Fontan!"

The Prince, with the greatest politeness, said:

"Monsieur Fontan, I drink to your success!"

Meanwhile the tails of His Highness's coat were wiping the marble of the wash-stand. It was like a narrow bath-room, with the steam rising from the warm water, and the moisture of the sponges. The Prince and Comte Muffat, between whom Nana stood, were obliged to hold their hands up high, lest they, at the smallest movement, should

touch her. Satin looked on in wonder, and thought to herself that chic people were none too well mannered after all!

The call-boy was heard approaching. He showed himself at the door, and when he beheld Fontan, Prullière and Bosc still in their costumes of the second act, was utterly aghast.

"Oh! gentlemen! gentlemen!" he exclaimed; "pray make haste, the bell will ring in one minute!"

"Pshaw!" answered Bordenave, quietly; "let them wait!"

After new bows and new compliments, the actors, as there was no more Champagne, decided to go and dress. Bosc, having got his beard wet with the wine, took it off to dry it, and all at once the drunkard's face was revealed—the weary, lined, and crimson face of an old actor who had fallen into evil ways.

In Nana's dressing-room were now only His Highness, the Count and the Marquis. Bordenave had gone off with the call-boy, whom he was admonishing never to open Madame's door without due notice to Madame.

"Gentlemen, excuse me," said Nana, turning to her mirror and beginning to make up her face and arms.

The Prince took a seat on the divan, while the Marquis de Chouard dropped into a chair. The Comte de Muffat continued to stand. The two glasses of Champagne and this suffocating heat had suddenly added to their intoxication. Little Satin, seeing these gentlemen settle themselves as it were with her friend, thought it wise to retreat behind the curtain, and there waited sitting on a trunk. Madame Tiby moved to and fro, still preparing the tunic Venus was to wear.

"You sang wonderfully to-night," said the Prince.

Thus was the conversational ball started, but was kept up with short phrases by Nana, for she could not always reply.

She was putting cold cream on her face, and then adding liquid white with the assistance of a napkin. She turned from the mirror with a coquettish glance at the Prince.

"Ah! your Highness," she murmured, "you spoil me!"

This was too much for the Marquis Chouard, who pressed forward.

"Cannot the orchestra be induced to accompany you more softly?" he asked. "It sometimes commits the unpardonable crime of drowning your voice entirely."

This time Nana did not turn, she had taken the hare's foot, and was using it slowly and carefully.

A long silence reigned. Madame Tiby noticing a slight rip in a part of Nana's dress, took a needle that was stuck in her waist over her heart, and knelt down to sew it up, while Nana, without paying any attention to her, covered herself with Poudre de Riz, avoiding putting any on her cheek bones, however. The Prince saying that were she to sing in London, all England would go wild, she turned for a moment, the left cheek very white and a cloud of powder flying all about her head.

Then leaning forward once more, with her face very near the mirror, she dipped her finger into a pot, and applied the rouge just under her eyes, rubbing the edges softly in.

The gentlemen maintained a respectful silence.

Comte Muffat had not yet opened his lips. He was thinking of his boyhood. His nursery was cold and loveless; when he was older and sixteen the memory of his mother's icy kiss each night haunted his slumber.

One day passing a half-open door he had seen his mother's maid at her toilette, and this was the only recollection that disturbed him from thence to his marriage. His wife had willingly fulfilled all her duties, while he felt almost the repugnance of a religious fanatic. He had grown old in ignorance of all temptations, absorbed in pious observances, regulating his life by precept and law, and all at once, without the smallest preparation, he was ushered into the dressing-room of this actress. He, who had never seen the Comtesse Muffat make her toilette, assisted now at the most intimate details of this woman's. Amid all this confusion of rouge pots and boxes, and in this heavy enervating atmosphere, his whole nature revolted. The slow possession which Nana had taken of him astonished and terrified him, and recalled to his mind some of his pious readings, and the stories of demoniac influence to which his cradle had been rocked. He believed in the Devil—vaguely in his

mind he accepted Nana as the personification of His Satanic Majesty. But he promised himself to be strong, and not allow himself to be taken in the snare.

"Then it is a settled thing," said the Prince, lounging at his ease on the divan. "You will come to London next year, and we will receive you so well that you will never come back to France. Ah! my dear Count, you don't make enough of your pretty women; we take them all from you."

"That will not disturb him!" murmured the Marquis de Chouard, maliciously, forgetting himself. "The Count is virtue itself!"

Nana, hearing his virtue spoken of, turned and looked at him with such a droll expression that Muffat was annoyed. Then he was angry with himself, as well as surprised at his own vexation. Why did the accusation of excessive virtue brought against him in the presence of this *fille* disturb him? He was furious with himself. Just then Nana dropped one of her brushes, and as she stooped he did the same, and he felt her warm breath on his cheek, while her hair—the hair of Venus—was tangled about his hands. Joy quickly followed by remorse thrilled his whole frame. He was like a man suddenly pricked, amid his pleasures, by the fear of Hell.

At this moment the call-boy knocked again.

"Madame," he said, piteously, "the house is becoming very impatient."

"They must wait nevertheless," answered Nana, tranquilly.

She had dipped her brush in a pot of lamp black, and, leaning forward close to the mirror, was lining her eyes delicately. Muffat, behind her, could see her reflection, her fair shoulders and rounded throat, with its faint rosy flush in the shadows, and he could not, despite all his efforts, turn away from this face made even more enticing by those half-closed eyes. As she entirely closed the left eye, and passed the brush across the lashes, he felt that he was her slave.

"Madame," and the call-boy knocked again. "Madame, the house is getting angry; there will be trouble if you don't come."

"Go away!" answered Nana, in a rage. "I tell you they must wait until I am ready."

And then, calming down a little, she turned to the gentlemen.

"It is a pity that I cannot be allowed a few minutes to talk with you," she said.

Her face and arms were at last finished. She had daubed with the tip of one finger some carmine on her lips, and the Comte Muffat was more disturbed than ever before in his life by this strange combination of rouge and powder—by this mouth of exaggerated red in this face of exaggerated white—by the eyes surrounded by their dark lines and shadows, which looked as if they had burned themselves out with passion. Nana, perfectly undisturbed, unbuttoned her corsage and extended her arms to Madame Tiby, that she might put on the short sleeves of her tunic.

"Make haste, if they are so frightfully out of temper," she said, in a loud voice.

The Prince, with half-closed eyes, surveyed each flowing outline of the woman before him with the air of a connoisseur, while the Marquis de Chouard nodded approvingly. Muffat turned his eyes away, and looked down upon the carpet. Venus, at last, was ready; the gauze of her tunic was arranged over her with care. Madame Tiby walked around her with her stiff little wooden air. Her eyes were bright, and she hurriedly plucked the pins from the inexhaustible supply over her heart, passing her dry, skinny hands over the satin roundness of Venus' shoulders, without a recollection of her own youth, and in the most disinterested manner.

"Here I am!" said Nana, with another parting glance at the mirror just as Bordenave appeared to say that the third act had begun.

"Well! I am ready!" she answered, indifferently. "What a fuss! It is I generally who have to wait for the others!"

The gentlemen left her dressing-room, but they did not take their leave. The Prince had expressed a wish to assist at the third act in the coulisses. When she was alone, Nana looked around in amazement.

"Where on earth is she?" she asked.

She was looking for Satin, and when she at last discovered her, sitting behind the curtain on a trunk, Satin said, quietly:

"Did you think that I wished to be in your way with all those men?"

And she arose to depart, but Nana detained her. How could she be so stupid? Had not Bordenave consented to engage her? and they would arrange the whole affair after the play was over. Satin hesitated; she did not like it; there was too much machinery about; it was all strange to her, she said—but she remained.

As the Prince descended the little staircase, a strange noise of stifled oaths was heard, and then a general scuffling and uproar. Mignon had been playing his rough jokes, as usual, upon Fauchéry, overwhelming him with affectionate solicitude, and giving him repeated cuffs and brushes to drive away the flies, as he said—all this to the great joy of the actors and machinists—while Fauchéry pretended to be amused with them, though quivering with rage. But suddenly Mignon, carried away by his success, absolutely struck Fauchéry a blow in the face—a good strong blow. This time he went too far. Fauchéry could not, before all these people, accept with a laugh an insult like this, and the two men, ceasing their comedy, caught at each other's throats, and were presently rolling on the floor.

"Monsieur Bordenave! Monsieur Bordenave!" was the frightened cry from the stage-manager.

Bordenave hurried away, with an apology to the Prince. When he saw that it was Mignon and the Journalist who were fighting, he shrugged his shoulders angrily. Really! these men had chosen an excellent time for their quarrel, with His Royal Highness close at hand, and the whole audience within hearing. As the last crowning woe, Rose herself appeared, all out of breath. It was time for her to go upon the stage and reply to the words that Vulcan was that minute speaking. And what met her eyes? Her husband and his friend rolling together on the floor at her feet, with coats covered with dust and dishevelled hair. They impeded her movements, she could not pass them

One of the carpenters caught Fauchéry's hat, just as it was about to roll down upon the stage. Meanwhile, Vulcan, who was drawing on his imagination for phrases with which to amuse the public, now repeated the last sentence to which Rose was to reply, but Rose stood immovable, looking at the two men.

"Go on! Go on!" hissed Bordenave furiously in her ear. "Are you mad? This is none of your business. Be off with you!"

He hustled her along, and Rose, stepping over the struggling, gasping men, found herself before the flaring foot-lights and the impatient public. She could not imagine what this quarrel meant; and trembling from head to foot, with a strange confusion in her brain, she advanced with her beautiful smile—a loving Diana—and uttered the first phrases of her duo with so much fire that the public applauded her with vehemence. Behind the scenes she heard the dull blows inflicted by the two men. Fortunately the orchestra drowned this noise, so far as the audience was concerned.

"In the name of Heaven!" cried Bordenave, in exasperation, when he had at last succeeded in separating them, "can't you fight in your own home? You know very well that I don't like such things here. You, Mignon, will remain on this side always, when you are inside the theatre, and, Fauchéry, if you want the entrée here, you will stick to the other, or else, do you understand? I shall forbid Rose bringing you here."

When Bordenave went back to the Prince, His Royal Highness condescended to inquire as to the cause of the fracas.

"Oh! it is nothing," he said, with an easy air.

Nana, wrapped in her furs, was waiting for her entrée, and talking gayly with these gentlemen. The Marquis de Chouard was inspecting the house through a hole in the curtain. Comte Muffat went forward to join him, when a look from the stage-manager admonished him that he must move softly. In the deserted coulisses an occasional shadow flitted noiselessly to and fro, speaking in subdued tones. The man who managed the gas was at his post; a fireman leaning against a fly stretched his

neck and tried to see, while high up on his bench sat the man who had the curtain in charge, with the most resigned and weary look, careless of the play and intent only on the bells, which would indicate to him which rope to pull; and amid this stifling air, these whispers and mysterious creakings of ropes and machinery, the voices of the actors on the stage came with a strange, weird sound. Further off, too, were the confused bray of the orchestra, coming in gusts, and the buzz of the audience with an occasional outbreak of applause. The public was felt, even when invisible and silent.

"There is certainly something open somewhere," said Nana, suddenly drawing her furs around her with a shiver. "Look, Barillot; I am sure a window has been opened. It is enough to freeze one!"

But Barillot swore that he himself had shut everything. Perhaps there might be a pane or two broken—that he could not answer for. "Artists were always complaining of draughts," he muttered.

It was undeniably true that there was never such a place for taking cold as this. The heat of the gas, and then these sudden blasts of cold air.

Nana, in reply to Barillot's remark, that artists were always complaining of draughts, said, crossly:

"I should like to see how you would like it, if you were here dressed as we are!"

"Hush, hush," murmured Bordenave.

Rose had sung a passage in her duo so well that bravos drowned the orchestra. Nana stood still, very grave and quiet. Meanwhile the Count was exploring the scenery at the side, when Barillot stopped him. He saw, however, the wrong side of the scenery. The backs of the flies covered thick with various coatings of old placards; then a corner of the stage. The cavern of Mount Etna hewn out of a silver mine, with Vulcan's Forge at the back; the gigantic trestle work, set thick with gas-burners, illuminated the pieces of foil; red and green glasses adroitly managed produced the effect of flames in the forge.

Upon a gentle slope, amid all these scattered lights, sat old Madame Drouard, who played Juno, half asleep, waiting for her entrance.

But there was a sudden movement. Simonne, who was listening attentively to a story that Clarisse was telling her, turned and exclaimed:

"Look! there is La Tricon."

It was indeed La Tricon, with her English curls, and her Countess-like air. When she saw Nana she went directly to her.

The two women exchanged a few words, and then Nana said aloud:

"No, not now," and then walked away.

The old lady looked after her very gravely. Prullière, as he passed her, stopped to shake hands with her. Two little figurantes watched her with eagerness. She seemed to hesitate. Then she beckoned to Simonne, and there was again the same quick interchange of words.

"Yes," murmured Simonne, at last; "yes, in half an hour."

But as Simonne went toward her dressing-room, she met Madame Bron, who had come up again with letters, and who handed her one. Bordenave called the woman to him, and reproved her for allowing La Tricon to pass. The idea of such a thing! and on that evening, too, when His Highness was there! Madame Bron, who had been thirty years in the theatre, replied, with some sharpness.

"How was she to know?" she asked. "La Tricon had all sorts of business relations with these ladies, and Monsieur Bordenave had seen her there over and over again, and never found any fault with her before about it."

And while Bordenave choked down his anger, La Tricon calmly examined the Prince from head to foot, with the air of a woman who can read a man at a glance. A smile lighted her sallow face. She then moved off at a slow pace amid this crowd of respectful, deferential women—Bordenave's Seraglio.

She went once more to Simonne, who was reading a letter, and seemed considerably disturbed.

"You will come at once?" said the old lady.

Simonne's letter was from a young man whom she had promised to receive that evening, and who had written to remind her of that promise. She scrawled a few words, which she gave to Madame Bron.

"Impossible! Engaged!"

But she was uneasy. The young man might be waiting for her. As she was not in the third act, she wished to leave at once, so she begged Clarisse to go and investigate for her. Clarisse did not go on again until near the end of the act. She went down-stairs, therefore, for Simonne, while the latter went on to the dressing-room, which they occupied in common.

Below-stairs, in Madame Bron's tiny wine-shop, an actor, who took the part of Pluto, was drinking all alone, wrapped in a red robe covered with tongues of golden flames. The business of the concierge had certainly been flourishing that evening, for the air was thick with the moisture from the constant washing of glasses. Clarisse lifted the tunic she wore as Iris, to keep it from the filthy stairs, on the lowest of which she prudently halted, and looked into the lôge.

Wise indeed was she! For that idiot—La Faloise—was still there, seated in the very same chair between the table and the stove. He had pretended to depart when Simonne had seen him, but had at once come back again.

The lôge was crowded with well-dressed men—all wearing the same resigned and patient expression. All were gravely waiting. Only the dirty plates were left on the table. Madame Bron had distributed all the bouquets. A single rose had fallen to the floor, and was withering by the side of the black cat, who had curled herself into a ball, while kittens were tumbling over her in a wild frolic, or running like mad among the legs of these men.

Clarisse laughed to herself, for La Faloise did not like cats, and he sat with his elbows pinned close to his sides, and his eyes fixed on the animals, not knowing what they would do next. She was tempted to make a scene, and call him out.

"Take care of yourself!" muttered Pluto, who liked a joke, as he passed her. "You will catch it! I see it in his eye."

Then Clarisse relinquished her idea of "having it out" with La Faloise. She had seen Madame Bron give the letter to Simonne's young man. She saw him go to the gas-burner in the vestibule to read it.

"Impossible! Engaged!"

And then peaceably, and as if quite accustomed to that sort of thing, he walked off.

At least there was one man who knew how to behave. He was very different from the others—those who sat on those ragged chairs of Madame Bron's, in that huge glass lantern, which was so frightfully hot, and which smelt none too well.

What had got into the men? And Clarisse, disgusted and out of temper, slowly climbed the three flights of stairs again, to carry the information to Simonne which she had undertaken to acquire.

The Prince had taken Nana aside, and was talking to her in a low voice. He had not taken his eyes from her. Nana did not look at him, but smilingly gave a little nod that said yes. But suddenly Comte Muffat, deserting Bordenave, who was giving him some details in regard to the mechanism of the lights and other things, went up to them, and interrupted the conversation. He obeyed an all-powerful impulse. Nana looked up, and smiled upon him as she had smiled on His Highness. Meanwhile, she kept her ear open for her cue.

"The third act is the shortest, I believe," said the Prince, annoyed by the Comte's presence.

She did not answer. She was absorbed in her own matters. Suddenly, with a rapid movement of her shoulders, she dropped off her furs, which Madame Tiby, standing behind, caught in her arms. Quickly carrying both hands to her hair, as if to compose herself, she walked on to the stage.

"Hush! hush!" said Bordenave.

The Count and the Prince were amazed at the quickness with which she had moved. First a profound silence and then a long sigh came from the whole house almost simultaneously. Each evening precisely the same effect was produced by the appearance of Venus in her goddess-like

Muffat wished to see, and went to the hole in the curtain. Beyond the dazzling circle of foot-lights the house looked dark, and seemed filled with mist, and on this neutral tint, increased by row after row of heads, Nana stood

out, all white and tall, blotting out the balcony and the boxes.

He saw her back, the neck fading into the beautiful shoulders, the swelling hips and extended arms, while below at her feet, was the head of the prompter—an old man's head—steady and firm, with an honest, kindly expression in his face.

As she sang certain phrases they seemed to vibrate through her whole frame, falling from her throat to her waist, and thence to the hem of her tunic. When she uttered her last note amid a tempest of bravas, she sank back in a profound salutation, her long hair sweeping far below her waist. Seeing her thus retreating step by step toward the loop-hole, through which he was watching her, the Comte turned away, pale and discomfited. He no longer beheld the stage, he saw only the wrong side of all the decorations, and the dingy, dirty placards. All Olympus had gathered around old Madame Drouard, who was peacefully slumbering and waited for the end of the act. Bosc and Fontan were sitting on the floor, with their chins on their knees. Prullière stifled his yawns and waited, eager to go on the stage and be through, that he might go home and to bed.

At this moment Fauchéry, who was compelled to keep to that side designated by Bordenave, put his arm through the Count's, in order to appear to be at ease.

"You know little of this place, I believe?" said the Journalist. "Nothing could be more curious. Come with me, and I will show you about."

"I shall be only too glad," answered Muffat, conscious of a momentarily increasing weakness, and he followed Fauchéry, at the same time looking about to find the Marquis de Chouard, who had disappeared, and felt both relief and anxiety in quitting these coulisses, from whence he could hear Nana singing.

Fauchéry was already on the staircase, which was much like those in appearance, with which the Count was familiar in his expeditions in the interests of the Benevolent Association, of which he was a member—the iron railing polished by the constant friction of hands, and the wood worn away by innumerable feet. On each landing a

square window lighted the passage, and in the lanterns projecting from the wall the gas burned brightly, throwing a strong light on this squalid scene, and giving out a heat which grew more and more intense as they ascended.

"There are four stories," said Fauchéry, "and I assure you that you won't find it very cold up there!"

When Comte Muffat reached the foot of this staircase, he received a puff of warm air full in his face—air laden with the odor of musk, toilette vinegar and powder. He felt bewildered and almost stupefied. On the first floor corridors stretched along, having on either side the yellow doors common to a maison meublée, with huge white numbers upon them, the lower panels beaten and battered.

The Count ventured to look in at one open door, and saw a small and dirty room, the shop of a hair-dresser and wig-maker, furnished with two chairs and a table, with a drawer blackened by the grease of brush and combs. Here a young fellow was changing his linen, in the next room a woman was putting on her hat and gloves, ready to leave. But Fauchéry called the Count to come on, and they reached the second floor, when a hideous oath struck their ears. Mathilde, the *ingenue*, had broken her wash-basin, and a flood of soapy water ran across the corridor. A door was shut violently. Two women flew across it with two bounds. Then loud laughter, a quarrel and a song were heard, followed by silence. Doors were ajar, through which gleams of white arms and linen drapery were seen; one young girl was standing with her foot on a chair, mending a rent which had been made in her skirts. An occasional woman hastily closed her door out of delicacy.

On the third floor Muffat yielded to the intoxication which assailed him. The dressing-rooms of the figurantes and chorus-singers were there, twenty women crowded together in each, with their scented soaps, their lavender water and cheap perfumes.

In passing he heard behind a closed door a most terrific splashing—a tempest in a wash-basin. As he went up the last flight he had the curiosity to look through an open Judas into a room that was empty. The gas was blazing, and lighted only a wild disorder of skirts and feminine

apparel. This room was the last thing that he saw. Above, on the fourth floor, Muffat felt as if he should suffocate. All the odors and all the heat seemed to have gathered there. The gas burned through a yellow atmosphere. He held on to the iron railing, which he fancied was warm with a living heat, and closing his eyes, his senses drank in all this, of which hitherto he had been ignorant.

"Come on!" cried Fauchéry, who had momentarily disappeared; "somebody wants you."

At the end of the corridor was the dressing-room occupied by Clarisse and Simonne—a long, narrow attic, with sloping roof and weather-stained walls. Light came from above through two square, deep openings, from which hung the iron bars which served to raise the sashes. At this hour, however, four gas-burners lighted this room, the walls of which were covered with paper, at seven sous per roll—pink flowers running over a green trellis. Two shelves, side by side, did duty as toilette tables. These were covered with India-rubber cloth, blackened by water that had been slopped there, and under which were tin buckets, beaten and banged by hard usage, full of soapy water and huge pitchers of coarse yellow-ware. On the shelves were heaped all sorts of untidy things, by the side of the half-filled basins, horn-combs—broken and twisted—hair pins and brushes, ends of ribbon and lace: in short, the hundred and one articles which two women, hastily washing and dressing at the same time, leave around them in a place which they occupy but temporarily, and whose uncleanliness does not disturb them.

"Come on!" repeated Fauchéry, with that air of intimacy quickly adopted by men among these *filles*. "Clarisse has a tender word or two for you."

Muffat entered the room, where, to his infinite surprise, he beheld the Marquis de Chouard installed between the two dressing-tables, seated on a straw chair. He had retreated to this position, and hastily drawn up his feet because a bucket of water had been tipped over and a sea of soap-suds was rapidly invading the floor.

He had an air of being thoroughly at home, and of being able to select the most comfortable nooks, and

looked intensely happy among all this disorder and uncleanliness.

"So you are going with the old gentleman?" said Simonne in the ear of Clarisse.

"Occasionally!" she answered aloud.

The dresser, a young girl, ugly in appearance and familiar in her manner, was assisting Simonne to put on her cloak, at once fell into convulsions of laughter; the whole three women, in fact, seemed to consider that these words contained some tremendous joke.

"Come, Clarisse, give the gentleman a kiss," said Fauchéry.

And turning toward the Count, he added:

"You will see what a nice little girl she is; for she will kiss you, I am sure!"

But Clarisse was disgusted with men. She burst into a violent attack on the beasts which she said were crowded into that hole down-stairs with the concierge. Besides, she had not a moment to lose; it was time for her to be on the stage then. But, as Fauchéry would not move, she deposited two light kisses on Muffat's whiskers, saying:

"They are not for you, however. They are for Fauchéry, who is such an intolerable bore," and she ran away.

The Count stood, in considerable embarrassment, just in front of his father-in-law. His face was flushed. In Nana's luxurious boudoir, among her mirrors and dainty accessories of the toilette, he had not experienced one tithe of the emotion he felt here, amid the squalid poverty of this attic room. With a strange buzzing sound in his ears, he was as if stunned and had little idea of how long he stood there, or of what was going on. Then he saw that the Marquis was hurrying after Simonne, and urging something vehemently. She shook her head. Fauchéry followed them, laughing aloud. Muffat was left alone with the dresser, who was emptying the wash-basins.

He, too, went away, descending the staircase with trembling limbs, seeing, as he went, more half-clad women scudding through the passages, and flinging the doors to with a bang as they saw him. But amid all these strange scenes, he had but one distinct impression: that of a huge cat, who, basking in this heated furnace, pattered

slowly down the stairs, rubbing herself against the railing with her tail high in the air.

"Well!" said a hoarse voice, a woman's, "I thought it would never be through to-night."

It was the end. The curtain had just fallen, and there was a wild rush through the corridor, and up and down the stairs, of eager women anxious to dress and depart. As Comte Muffat reached the last stair, he saw Nana and the Prince walking slowly down the corridor. Nana stopped, and with a smile and in a low whisper, she said:

"I will be ready, presently!"

The Prince went back to the stage, where Bordenave was waiting for him. Then, alone in the corridor with Nana, the Comte, yielding to a wild and passionate longing—half anger and half love—hurried after her, and, as she reached her dressing-room, he kissed her neck, just where the light fluffy hair grew. It was like the kiss he had received up-stairs, here returned.

Nana wheeled with uplifted hand. But, when she saw the Comte, she smiled.

And her smile was adorable, a mixture of confusion and submission, as if she had despaired of ever receiving this kiss, and was made happy by its tardy coming. But he must wait. Her eyes said that. Then she spoke:

"You know, perhaps, that I have bought a country house near Orleans, a part of the country where you go sometimes? Bébé told me so at least, and so did Georges Hujon, whom you know. Come and see me there."

The Count, now shocked at his brutality, relapsed into his natural timidity, and, quite ashamed of himself, replied with ceremonious politeness, promising to accept her kind invitation. He rejoined the Prince, and, as he passed the Foyer, he heard Satin say:

"I wish you would let me alone!"

These words were addressed to the Marquis de Chouard. Satin had had quite enough of these people. Nana had just presented her to Bordenave, and had obtained his promise of an engagement for her. But Satin was now tired of being on her best behavior—tired of keeping her lips tight shut, lest she should utter some folly, and wished to escape all the more, because she had fallen in the

coulisses upon an old friend, the man who played Pluto, a former pastry cook. She was waiting for him now, and was quite indignant that the Marquis should address her as if she were one of the actresses attached to the theatre. She became quite dignified, and, drawing herself up, said:

"My husband is coming; you will see what he will have to say."

Meanwhile the actors, with weary face and step, departed one by one. Groups of men and women were continually hurrying down the stairs, throwing on the walls the shadows of their battered hats, and faded, ragged shawls. On the empty stage, where most of the lights were by this time extinguished, the Prince was still standing with Bordenave. He had sent to say to the two officers who were waiting for him in his box that he would meet them at the door on the sidewalk.

The Prince was waiting to see Nana, when she at last appeared. The only light was that of the lantern carried in the hand of the gas-fitter, who was making his last rounds. Bordenave, to avoid taking His Highness through the Passage des Panoramas, had ordered the corridor thrown open which led from the loge of the concierge to the vestibule of the theatre. The women were scurrying through this passage, eager to escape from the men who were besetting them. Fontan, Bosc and Prullière slowly retired, much amused by the sight of the crowd of men, who were pacing up and down on the other side, watching the departure of these girls with the lovers of their hearts. But Clarisse was very acute; she had a shrewd suspicion that La Faloise had not gone, and she was right, for he was still there in the companionship of these gentlemen, who occupied Madame Bron's chairs. Clarisse passed with head held high, and another woman with her. These men started up, considerably disturbed by this rush of skirts, in despair at having been kept waiting so long, and then at seeing these women flit past without even being able to know which was which among them.

The black kittens were asleep on the oil-cloth, curled up to their mother, who was the picture of comfort, while the

huge tomcat, seated at the other end of the table, watched with his yellow eyes the dim figures of the women hurrying by.

"If His Highness will take the trouble to come this way," said Bordenave at the foot of the stairs, pointing toward the narrow, dingy passage. The Prince followed Nana; Muffat and the Marquis came last. It was a long, narrow passage between the theatre and the next house, which had been roofed in and fitted with an occasional window pane. A frightful, chilly dampness seemed to ooze from the black, mouldy wall. Each footfall echoed as in a subterranean passage. There were all sorts of things piled up—a work-bench and plane used occasionally by the concierge, and a quantity of wooden railings that were set up at night to keep back the crowd. Nana raised her skirts as she passed a hydrant, the faucet of which was imperfectly closed. In the vestibule they separated, and when Bordenave was alone he shrugged his shoulders with philosophic disdain. This shrug spake volumes in regard to his judgment upon the Prince.

"He is a simpleton, all the same!" he said, without further explanation, to Fauchéry, whom Rose Mignon insisted should go with her, that her husband and he might be reconciled at home.

Muffat stood alone on the sidewalk. The Prince turned back, having put Nana in her carriage. The Marquis followed Satin and her Pluto, hoping yet to win some favor from her. Then Muffat, with his head on fire, determined to walk home. He had ceased to struggle. A flood of new life had shipwrecked all the beliefs and ideas of his forty years. As he traversed the Boulevards he heard through the roar of the carriages Nana's name syllabled over and over again; amid the blaze of the gas he beheld Nana's white shoulders and supple arms: and he felt that she had taken possession of all his senses. His youth awakened at this late hour, annihilating his cold Catholicism and his manly dignity.

CHAPTER IX.

CABBAGES AND ROSES.

COMTE MUFFAT, accompanied by his wife and his daughter, had arrived the previous evening at Fondettes, where Madame Hujon, who was there alone with her son Georges, had invited them to spend a week. The house, built toward the end of the seventeenth century, rose in the centre of an immense park, somewhat bare and unornamented; but the garden made amends in its beautiful shrubberies and fountains, fed from living streams, and tall trees, which were a delightful relief to the monotony of the long dull road between Orleans and Paris.

At eleven o'clock, when the second breakfast bell had brought every one together, Madame Hujon, with her kind, maternal smile, kissed Sabine on either cheek, saying:

"You know in the country that this is one of my privileges. It makes me twenty years younger. Did you sleep well in your old chamber?"

Then without waiting for the reply, she turned toward Estelle:

"And the child slept well, too, did she not? Kiss me, dear."

They were seated in the great dining-room, whose windows looked out on the park, but as they were only five, they were at the end of the long table, rather close together. The Count asked if the postman arrived at two o'clock regularly. Sabine, in excellent spirits, recalled the recollections of her childhood, the months she had spent at Fondettes, the long walks, a tumble into the basin on a summer evening—an old romance of the days of chivalry discovered in a wardrobe, and read in the winter by the light of the fire.

And Georges, who had not seen the Countess for some time, thought her changed and odd, while Estelle was as silent and insignificant as ever.

As they eat their fresh-laid eggs and cutlets, Madame

Hujon lamented over the degeneracy of butchers. She marketed at Orleans, but she could never get anything she ordered. Besides, if her guests got nothing to eat, it was their own fault: they came too late in the season.

"There is no sense in it," she said. "I expected you, all through June, and now it is the middle of September. You see it is no longer pretty."

And she waved her hand toward the lawn, where the trees were yellowing. The day was cloudy, a bluish mist hung over the distant hills, and a gentle melancholy pervaded the scene.

"I have invited company," she continued, "and then it will be more lively. First, there are two gentlemen whom Georges has asked, Monsieur Fauchéry and Monsieur Daguenet. You know them, I believe. Then there is Monsieur de Vandeuvres. It is true that he has been promising to come for the last five years and has not got here yet, but it may be different now."

"Ah!" said the Countess, laughing, "we won't have Monsieur Vandeuvres. He is too busy in Paris. You forget my father, too. He will be here to-morrow."

"And Philippe?" asked Muffat.

"Philippe applied for leave," answered Madame Hujon, "but I very much fear that by the time he gets here you will be gone."

Coffee was served; the conversation fell on Paris, and Steiner's name was pronounced, which elicited an exclamation from Madame Hujon.

"By the way," she said, "is not Monsieur Steiner the stout gentleman whom I met at your house one night? A Banker, unless I greatly mistake. He is certainly a nice sort of person! He has recently bought an estate near here—only about a league away—for an actress. The whole country about is scandalized. Have you heard anything about it?"

"No, nothing," answered Muffat. "And so Steiner has bought an estate near here, has he?"

Georges, hearing his mother broach this subject, buried his nose in his cup; but, at this reply from the Count, he looked up quickly with astonishment. How could he tell such a square, direct falsehood?

The Comte, on his side, who had noticed these movements on the part of the young man, threw at him a glance of defiance. Madame Hujon continued to give details. To get to this place it was necessary to cross a bridge, unless one risked a wetting; but the bridge increased the distance by two good kilometres.

"And what is this actress called?" asked the Countess, who was calmly listening.

"Dear me! I was told," answered the old lady, "I was told only this morning. Georges, you were present this morning when the gardener was telling us."

Georges adopted an expression of intense thought. Muffat waited patiently, twirling a teaspoon between his fingers.

Then the Countess turned to her husband and said:

"It must be that actress at the Variétés—Nana."

"Nana! yes, that is it," cried Madame Hujon. "And she is to reside at La Mignotte! I heard it all from the gardener. In fact she is to come this very night Georges, did not the gardener say so?"

The Comte started in some surprise, which Georges saw.

"Oh! mamma," he said, gayly. "The gardener did not know what he was talking about. He is a stupid fellow. But the coachman told me just now that no one was expected at La Mignotte before day after to-morrow."

He tried to look unconcerned and indifferent, at the same time studying the effect of his words upon the Comte, who was playing with his teaspoon in a contented sort of way.

The Comtesse, with her eyes fixed on the misty park, seemed not to hear the conversation, but to be absorbed in some subtle thought or souvenir which brought a faint smile to her lips, while Estelle, erect and motionless on her chair, listened to what was said of Nana, without a change in her fair face.

"Good heavens!" murmured Madame Hujon, her excitement having somewhat abated. "I don't know why I should care. The sun shines no worse for us, I presume. We cannot expect to make people after our own pattern. If we chance to meet this grande dame on the highway we

shall have to resort to all sorts of contrivances not to bow to her!"

And as they left the dining-room, she resumed her lecture to the Comtesse Sabine for having allowed her to expect her vainly all the year. But the Comtesse defended herself, throwing all the blame on her husband. Twice she had been ready to come; her trunks were packed and locked, when he had countermanded the order, and talked of urgent business which would keep him in town. Then, all at once, when she had given up the trip entirely, had suddenly decided upon it.

Then Madame Hujon told how Georges, too, had disappointed her, over and over again, when she looked forward to his coming, and finally dropped down upon her when she least expected him.

The two ladies walked toward the garden, the Comte de Muffat and Georges by their side, listening in silence to these words.

"No matter," said the old lady, kissing her son's fair hair. "Zizi is a dear boy, and never forgets his mother; he is a good boy, too, to like to shut himself up in the country with her."

Zizi was his mother's pet name for Georges.

In the afternoon, Madame Hujon felt a little anxiety in regard to this idolized boy. Georges, on leaving the breakfast table, complained of a slight headache, which increased with great rapidity, until at last he declared, about four o'clock, that he should take to his bed—it was his only remedy—and after a good sleep he should be all right, and himself again the next day.

His mother followed him, to see that he had all that he wanted, and herself drew the coverlid over him and darkened the windows. No sooner, however, had she left the room than he jumped from the bed and locked his door, calling out to her that he did so to prevent any one disturbing him. He added:

"Good-night, little mother! I shall be all right in the morning!"

His voice was a caress, and Madame Hujon smiled at the sleepiness of its tone.

He did not, however, return to his couch, but with a

heightened color, bright eyes, and noiseless movements proceeded to dress himself, and then sat motionless in a chair, apparently waiting for something. When the dinner-bell rang, he cautiously looked out, and watched Comte Muffat enter the dining-room. Ten minutes later, sure of not being seen, he leaped lightly from the window, and had no difficulty in reaching the ground. His chamber was on the second floor, in the rear of the house.

Keeping well in the shelter of the trees, he went out of the park through a small door in the wall, and rushed across the fields toward La Choue, hungry but happy. As night came on, a fine rain began to fall.

Nana had reached her house that same evening. Ever since Steiner had purchased it, a month previous, she had been wild to reside in it, and had fairly wept at the impossibility of obtaining a leave, however short, from Bordenave. He declared that he would not give her up, not for one evening, during the Exposition. He talked of September, but when the end of August came, he spoke of October.

Nana, in a rage, declared that with or without his consent she would go to her country house on the 15th of September; and in Bordenave's very presence, in order to brave him, she invited a number of persons to join her there.

One afternoon, when Muffat—whom she resisted with that feminine instinct which demanded that once in her life she should be rapturously loved—took her hands in his with passionate words of entreaty, she answered that he must wait until she went to the country, and to him, too, she mentioned the 15th.

Three days before that date, however, moved by a sudden caprice, she went off alone with Zoé. Perhaps Bordenave, had he suspected this intention, would have found some way of detaining her. It pleased her hugely, when she was established, to send him a bulletin from her physician. She signified her intention to no one but the man who was in charge of her house, but when the notion first seized her, drove poor Zoé about like a very fury, bidding her hurry with the trunks; but when they were fairly off in the fiacre, she asked pardon of the surly waiting-woman.

On reaching the station she thought it only proper to

notify Steiner, and wrote to him not to come until the day after, as she needed rest. And then all at once she had another idea, and scrawled a note to her aunt, Madame Lerat, bidding her bring little Louis to her as soon as possible. It would do the child so much good, and what fun it would be to play with him under the trees! All the way from Paris to Orléans she could talk of nothing else—her eyes were suffused with tears in a sudden access of maternal affection. Flowers, birds, green trees and her child, were all jumbled together in her mind.

La Mignotte was only about three leagues from Orléans. Nana lost an hour in trying to find a carriage. She at last succeeded in getting a huge calèche, which rolled slowly along with a great creaking and rattling of iron. She entered at once into conversation with the coachman, a little taciturn old man, whom she overwhelmed with questions. Had he ever been to Mignotte? Did he pass by there often? Was it behind that hill? Were there many trees about it? and could it be seen from a distance?

The little man answered with grunts and monosyllables. In the calèche Nana fidgeted with impatience, while Zoé, furious at being hurried away from Paris in this unceremonious fashion, sat stiff and sulky. The horse suddenly stopped, and Nana, supposing that they had arrived, thrust her head out, with the eager question:

"Well! is this it?"

The coachman made no reply, but lashing his horse, the animal slowly began the ascent of a hill. Nana contemplated with rapture the immense plain outspread before her under the gray sky, where clouds massing together indicated a coming shower.

"Look, Zoé, look at the grass! Is that wheat over there? Heavens! How beautiful it is!"

"It is easy to see that Madame does not know much about the country," answered the woman, with a supercilious air. "As for me," she continued, "I know it only too well. I had quite enough of it when I lived with the dentist who had a house at Bongeval. It is cold, too, to-night, and dreadfully damp here!"

They passed under some trees, and Nana sniffed the air like a young dog. Suddenly, at a turn in the road, she

perceived the corner of a house through the branches That was hers undoubtedly. She attacked the coachman, who shook his head and said no. As they came down the other side of the hill, he extended his whip and murmured:

"Look! There it is!"

Nana stretched herself out of the calèche, but could see nothing.

"Where? Tell me where?" she cried, pale, and her hands trembling with impatience.

At last she discovered an end of a wall, and began to utter little cries and to move restlessly about, after the manner of women under excitement.

"Zoé! I see it! I see it! Look, quick! out this side! There it is, and there is a brick parapet round the roof. I see a hot-house, too! Why! it is a great big house! Dear me! How beautiful! Look, Zoé, look!"

The carriage stopped at the gate, which opened, and the gardener, a tall, thin fellow, appeared, hat in hand. Nana tried to resume her dignity, for she fancied that the man who drove was laughing at her. She had great difficulty in not starting off at a full run, and listened to the gardener, who begged Madame to excuse the disorder, as he had only received her letter that morning; but notwithstanding all her efforts, her feet carried her so rapidly over the ground that Zoé could not keep up with her.

At the end of a long avenue she stood still to inspect the house. It was large, and built in the Italian style of architecture, flanked by another building, smaller, squarer, and more compact, which had been erected by a rich Englishman, who became disgusted with it almost immediately.

"I will show Madame the way," said the gardener.

But she hurried past him saying that he could go on with his work, she did not need him. And without stopping to throw off her hat, she ran from room to room, calling out to Zoé, and making comments to her from one end of the corridors to the other. Her voice and laughter pervaded the whole empty house, which for many a long month had been left to solitude and darkness.

First there was the large hall, which was a little damp. That, however, mattered nothing, as no one slept there. The salon was very nice, with its windows opening on the

lawn, but the red furniture was hideous; it must be changed. And the dining-room! Heavens! what a dining-room! What fêtes she could give if she only had that dining-room in Paris!

As she ascended the stairs she suddenly remembered that she had not seen the kitchen. She went down again, and she and Zoé wondered over its conveniences—the beauty of the sink, and the size of the fireplace, where a sheep could easily have been roasted.

When she at last went up-stairs the room she selected for herself excited her enthusiasm. It had been fitted up by an Orléans upholsterer, in the style of Louis XVI., in pale pink cretonne, and white varnished wood, the panels framed in pink. It was lovely, she thought; and one could sleep there very sweetly. It looked like the nest of a young girl.

Then there were four or five rooms to offer to friends, and a magnificent attic—so convenient for trunks! Zoé, still surly, glanced coldly about her, and delaying a little behind Madame, saw her just disappear up the steep ladder in the attic. The woman did not follow.

"Not I," she muttered. "I don't propose to break my neck here!"

But a voice called to her, far away it seemed, and half smothered by some intervening obstacle.

"Oh! Zoé, come. Where are you? Come up quick; it is fairy land."

Zoé went up with audible grumbling. She found Madame upon the roof leaning over the brick parapet looking down into the valley, which was like a rift in the level plain. The view was immense—the horizon stretched before her black with shifting clouds—the wind was rising, and brought with it a cold fine rain. Nana held her hat close to her head with both hands, or it would have been carried away, while her skirts flew out with the cracking and rattling of flags.

Zoé stuck the tip of her nose out, and hastily pulled it back.

"No, indeed!" she said. "I shall not come out there. Madame will be blown away. I never knew such nasty weather."

Nana did not hear. She leaned still further over the parapet, and looked at the grounds attached to the house. There must have been at least seven or eight acres enclosed by walls. The sight of the kitchen garden was too much for her; she flew down the ladder, nearly upsetting Zoé, and, putting her arms around her, cried out:

"Cabbages! cabbages! Zoé, and lettuce, sorrel—all sorts of things! Come, quick!"

The rain was increasing. She opened her white silk parasol and ran down the path.

"Madame will certainly take cold!" cried Zoé, standing calmly under the shelter of the porch.

Nana was determined to investigate, however, and at each new discovery there were new exclamations.

"Zoé, spinach! Come; and here are artichokes. They are so queer, and they have flowers, too! But what is this? I don't know it. Come and see, perhaps you can tell."

But Zoé did not move. Madame was certainly crazy. The rain was coming down in torrents. The dainty white umbrella was already black and did not cover Madame, whose skirts were all dripping. That was no matter, however, and did not disturb Nana in the least. In spite of the shower she examined the kitchen garden, and the orchard, halting at each tree and bending over each bed of vegetables. She ran to the well and looked down, lifted a sash to see what manner of choice plants were so tenderly cared for, and further on stood for some moments in rapt contemplation of an enormous pumpkin.

She felt an irresistible craving to tread with the step of a proprietor on all these paths, and to take immediate possession of these things of which she had so often dreamed, when she, a slip-shod work-girl, lounged through the Parisian streets. The rain came down with redoubled force, but she scarcely noticed it. She could see nothing clearly, but used her fingers instead of eyes.

Suddenly, amid the gloom, she perceived strawberries. Then the remembrances of her childhood assailed her.

"Strawberries!" she cried; "strawberries! There are

some here; I can but just see them, but I can smell them Zoé, bring a plate, and come and pick some!"

And Nana crouched down in the wet grass, dropped her umbrella, and received the rain full on her head and shoulders. She picked the strawberries; her hands searching among the wet leaves. But Zoé brought no plate. As Nana rose to her feet she was startled. It seemed to her that she had seen something glide away and disappear into the darkness, and all at once heard a crackling among the branches.

"A wild animal!" she cried, with a gasp of horror. But she was too frightened to move.

In a second she saw that it was a man, and had recognized him.

"Why, it is Bébé. What on earth are you doing there, Bébé?"

"Doing!" answered Georges. "I came to see you."

Nana was dumbfounded.

"But how did you know I was here? Did the gardener tell you? You are wet through and through boy!"

"Indeed I am!" he answered. "I got caught in the rain, but I would not go back, and I tumbled into a ditch full of water, and now look at me."

Then Nana forgot all about the strawberries and became quite pitiful. Poor Bébé in a ditch full of water! Why! it was quite terrible. She dragged him toward the house, and said she would have a fire made at once.

"You know," he murmured, "that I was hiding among the trees for fear of being scolded, as I was in Paris, when I came to see you without being expected."

She laughed but made no reply, as she kissed him lightly on the forehead.

Up to this time she had treated him as the merest boy, laughed at all his declarations, and amusing herself with him, as if he were of no manner of consequence.

She did not know precisely what to do with him now. She finally insisted on taking him to her own sleeping-room, and having the fire lighted there. Zoé, who was habituated to all sorts of rencontres, was not in the least surprised to see Georges.

But the gardener who brought in the wood was astonished to see this dripping youth, to whom he certainly had not opened the gate. The man was quickly gotten rid of, however. A lamp was lighted, and the fire soon burned with a ruddy glow.

"He will certainly take cold!" exclaimed Nana, as she saw Georges shiver. "What can be done?"

Alas, there were no masculine garments on the premises, and she was about to recall the gardener, when an idea struck her, at which she laughed aloud.

Zoé was sent to the dressing-room to unpack the trunks, and ordered to bring a change of linen—skirts, dresses, and dressing-gown.

"The boy can get into these!" cried Nana, "and when his own clothes are dry he can put them on and hurry home, lest his mother should lecture him."

Then turning to Georges, she said "Make haste. I am going to my dressing-room to get out of my wet things too!"

When she came back ten minutes later, in her peignoir, she clasped her hands in ecstasy.

"Oh! the darling! What a lovely little woman he makes!"

He had put on a long night-dress, a skirt, and a peignoir of batiste, trimmed with lace. In these garments he looked like a girl, his white arms shown by the flowing sleeves, and his fair hair curling in his neck.

"Can it be that he is no larger than I?" said Nana, putting her arm around his waist. "Come here, Zoé, and see how this fits him; it is as if it were made for him, except over the bust, where it is too large. Upon my word, this boy is smaller than I!"

Georges admitted this fact with a smile, and they all three laughed at the joke. Nana insisted on buttoning the peignoir all the way down, and turned him round and round as if he had been a doll that she was dressing. She put in a pin here and another there, making the skirt more bouffante, all the time questioning him, asking him if he were warm enough.

"Yes," he said, "he was warm and comfortable; he liked these skirts and things, and wished he could wear them always." As he spoke he wrapped the soft peignoir

around him, feeling that in it, lingered something of Nana's personality.

In the meanwhile, Zoé had carried off the lad's wet garments to the kitchen, where she was bidden to dry them just as rapidly as possible. Then Georges, comfortably established in an arm-chair, ventured on a confession.

"Don't you intend to have anything to eat to-night? I am literally famished!"

Nana scolded him. What a little simpleton he was to run away, walk all that distance on an empty stomach, and tumble into a ditch. But she too was hungry; but she doubted the capacities of the house as to providing much of a meal. However, a small table was rolled in front of them, and the oddest possible dinner was improvised. Zoé ran to the gardener, who had made a cabbage-soup in case that Madame had not dined at Orléans. Madame had given him no orders in regard to any meal, in the letter which she had written. Fortunately, there was plenty of wine in the cellar. There was, therefore, the cabbage-soup to begin with. Then Nana produced from the bag numerous things, with which she had provided herself in case of accident—a small pâté de foie gras, a paper of bonbons, and some oranges. They both ate like ogres, with an appetite that belongs only to twenty years, and were happy and gay in the society of each other.

Nana called Georges "my dear," which seemed to him tender as well as familiar. At dessert, out of consideration for Zoé, they emptied with the same spoon—taking turns—a jar of sweetmeats they discovered among the china.

"Upon my word," said Nana, pushing back the guéridon, "it is ten years since I dined so well!"

But it was growing late, and she was anxious to send the boy away, lest he should get into trouble. But he declared that he had plenty of time. Besides, his clothing dried but slowly; Zoé said that he could not put them on for another hour, and as she was very tired, they told her she need not wait, but could go off to bed. The lad could go down into the kitchen, dress there and go away.

It was a charming evening. The fire was dying away but the large blue-room was too warm. Nana, oppressed by the heat, went to the window and looked out.

"Good Heavens!" she cried, "how beautiful! Come and look, my dear!"

Georges obeyed, and standing at Nana's side, he put his arm around her waist, and laid his head on her shoulder. The weather had changed; the cloudless sky was spread before them with a large round moon sailing triumphantly across it, and flooding the whole country with its silvery light.

Nana was touched and moved. She was a child again. She had dreamed of such nights at a period in her life which she now rarely recalled. All she had seen from the time she left the cars—the beautiful country, the spacious house, the odor of the flowers and the vegetables—made her feel as though it were twenty years since she left Paris.

Georges kissed her throat again and again; his kisses added to the strange disorder of her emotions. With a trembling hand she pushed him aside, as if he had been an importunate child whose affection disturbed her, and told him again that he must depart.

He answered that he would go presently. The song of a nightingale cleft the air; it seemed to be just under the window.

"Wait!" said Georges. "The lamp frightens him. I will put it out."

And when he came back, he put his arm about his companion's waist, saying:

"We will light it again presently."

Then with the boy close to her side, and listening to the nightingale, Nana recalled the past. Yes, she had certainly read in some novel of a scene like this. Once she would have given the world for this moon and nightingale, and a youth who adored her. She could have wept, so sweet did all this seem. Why had she not lived a better life? she asked herself, as she repelled Georges, who grew bolder.

"No, my boy," she answered; "I choose to remain your mamma."

Her face flushed, and she felt ashamed, and yet no one could see. The country before them was utterly solitary. She tried to laugh; this disguise was preposterous; but her

laugh faded, as her hands were seized by this boy in the silence of this quiet house.

The next day at Fondettes, when the bell rang for breakfast, the table in the dining-room was none too large. A carriage from the early train had brought Fauchéry and Daguenet, and in the following train came the Comte de Vandeuvres. Georges made his appearance somewhat pale, but answered all inquiries by saying that he had not quite recovered from his headache. His mother watched him with a faint, anxious smile, smoothed his hair, which was not as carefully brushed as usual. He recoiled under her touch, as if annoyed by this caress. As they seated themselves at the table, she made a playful attack on the Comte de Vandeuvres, for whom she said she had waited five years.

"At last you are here! And how did you manage it?"

Vandeuvres answered in the same gay tone. He declared he had lost so large a sum of money at play the night before at the club, that he left town at once with the determination of putting an end to himself in the country.

"Unless," he added, "you can find me an heiress hereabouts. You ought to have some charming women here."

Madame Hujon thanked Daguenet and Fauchéry also, for having accepted her son's invitation, when she was surprised and deeply gratified by seeing the Marquis de Chouard drive up in a third carriage.

"Upon my word!" she cried; "may I ask if you all agreed to meet here this morning? It is truly delightful. For years I have striven to get you here, and all in vain—and now you come of yourselves; but I do not complain, you may be sure."

Another place was laid. Fauchéry found himself at the side of the Countess Sabine, who surprised him by gayety that offered a strong contrast to her gravity when he had seen her in La Rue de Merosmesnil. Daguenet, seated near Estelle, seemed disturbed by the vicinity of this tall, silent girl, whose pointed elbows and narrow shoulders were especially obnoxious to his eyes. Muffat and Chouard exchanged a stealthy glance. Vandeuvres was still talking and jesting at his approaching marriage.

"By the way," said Madame Hujon, suddenly, "we

have a new neighbor; one, I dare say, whom you know."

And she named Nana. Vandeuvres affected the greatest astonishment.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Nana's country-place so near here!"

Fauchéry and Daguenet also pretended great surprise. The Marquis eat a bit of the breast of a chicken, without appearing to notice what was said. No one of the men smiled.

"Yes," said the old lady, "and this person arrived yesterday, as I said; at least so I was just told by the gardener."

The gentlemen were now really surprised. They looked up hastily. What! Nana really arrived, when she was not expected until the next day. They thought themselves first on the field. Georges was the only one who did not lift his eyes. He sat looking into his wine-glass, with a half smile on his lips, but an absent, weary look in his eyes.

"Are you still suffering, my son?" asked his mother, who hardly took her eyes from him.

He started, and answered with a blush that he was very well, and relapsed into his dreamy, fatigued air, like that of a young girl who has danced too much.

"What is that on your neck?" resumed the old lady, with a start; "a large red spot!"

He stammered some unintelligible reply. He did not know there was anything on his neck, confusedly pulling up his collar as he spoke.

"Some sting, I suppose," he added.

The Marquis de Chouard glanced obliquely at this red spot. Muffat also looked at Georges.

As they finished breakfast, they began to form plans for some excursion. Fauchéry watched the Comtesse Sabine with keen interest. As he handed her a plate of fruit, their hands met; and she fixed upon him her velvety black eyes, for a moment in such a way, that again he remembered the confidence his friend had made to him.

There was some subtile change in her: whence came it, and what was it? The dress of gray foulard, soft and flowing, added to her graceful elegance. On leaving the table

Daguenet lingered behind with Fauchéry to utter some merry jests in regard to Estelle's sharp shoulders; but his countenance changed when the Journalist told him the amount of her dowry—four hundred thousand francs.

"And the mother?" asked Fauchéry, "don't you think her very chic?"

"Passably so; but you won't do anything there, my boy, if that's your game!"

"Won't I? Well! who can tell?"

There was no going out that day, as the rain came down in torrents. Georges had disappeared, and locked himself into his room. All these men carefully avoided the smallest allusion to Nana; but no one was duped by the others, in regard to the reasons that had brought them all there at this time.

There was considerable truth in what Vandeuvres had said about having suffered at play, and having then suddenly conceived the idea, of a visit to the country, where the vicinity of a friend would prevent him from being too utterly bored.

Daguenet hoped, vaguely, that if Steiner were away, he might manage an interview with Nana. Fauchéry simply profited by a vacation accorded him by Rose, who was so busy in Paris that Mignon himself had taken a holiday, and gone off with his two boys. He too proposed to occupy himself a little with Nana, if occasion should serve. As to the Marquis de Chouard, he watched his chances.

But among all these men in pursuit of Venus, only half cleansed from her rouge, Muffat was the most ardent and most carried away by new sensations of mingled fear, anger and love. He had received a formal promise. Nana had bidden him wait. Why, then, had she come earlier than the date she had fixed? He determined to find this out for himself that day after dinner.

That evening, as the Count left the park, Georges was close at his heels; but he let the Count go by the highway, while he took a short cut across the fields, and fell at Nana's feet, breathless, and with tears of rage and despair in his eyes.

"Ah! he understood!" he murmured, "he understood very well that the Comte was coming by appointment."

Nana, stupefied by this scene of jealousy, and disturbed by the way things were going, took the boy in her arms, and consoled him as best she could.

"No, indeed!" she said, "she expected no one. If the gentleman was on his way, it was not by her invitation or with her knowledge. Georges was a little simpleton to become so much excited about nothing." She swore that she loved only Georges, as she kissed him and dried his tears. "Listen, and you will believe me," she continued, when he was calmer; "Steiner has come, and is up-stairs. You will admit that I could not turn him out of doors."

"Yes, I know. I was not speaking of him," answered the boy.

"I told him I was far from well, and sent him to one of the upper rooms, where he is unpacking his trunks. As no one has seen you, you may go up-stairs as softly as possible, conceal yourself in my room, and wait for me!"

Georges embraced her, with thanks. It was true, then; she did love him a little. Then it would be like yesterday. He would put out the light and remain with her in the darkness until daybreak. There was a sharp peal at the bell, and he went lightly up the stairs, stopping on the first landing to take off his shoes, and then, creeping softly along, waited in Nana's room.

Nana received Comte Muffat with a certain restraint. She had promised him, and even wished to keep her word, because the man seemed in such deadly earnest. But who on earth could ever have suspected the occurrences of the previous night? This journey—this house, which was so unfamiliar to her—this boy coming to her through the darkness and the rain, making himself her lover, and now how could she dismiss him? It was hard on Muffat, certainly. She had been holding back for three months, playing the part of a modest woman, and thus conquered him.

Well, he must continue to wait, that was all; and could take himself away if he did not like it. She would rather he would do that than deceive poor Georges.

Muffat was seated with the ceremonious air of a country neighbor paying a visit. His hands alone showed his emotion—they trembled. In his sanguine nature, love, spurred by Nana's able tactics, had committed sad ravages. This grave and dignified man—this Chamberlain—who traversed with haughty step the salons of the Tuileries, passed his nights in a state of absolute frenzy. But he had determined to bring things to a climax, and all along the road, in the calm, peaceful twilight, had dreamed of brutalities.

After the first words he attempted to take Nana in his arms.

"No," she said, simply, without growing angry. "No—and take care!"

He grasped her again, with his teeth tight-set, and told her in so many words, with brutal frankness, that he had come there to remain.

She, with a smile, but with some embarrassment, bade him go and leave her. She spoke softly, even tenderly, hoping thus to soften her refusal.

"Steiner is here," she said; "it is impossible, you can see that, surely."

But he was mad; never had she seen a man in a similar state. She began to be really frightened. She put her hands over his lips to silence his voice, and implored him to be quiet.

Steiner was coming down the stairs at that very moment, and when the Banker entered he found Nana lounging in her low-chair, and saying, lazily:

"As to myself, I adore the country." She looked round as she spoke. "Ah! it is you," she said. "Comte Muffat saw our lights, my dear, as he was taking his evening stroll, and has come to welcome us."

The two men shook hands with each other. Muffat did not speak for some seconds, his face was in shadow. They talked of Paris, business was looking badly; certain abominations were winked at at the Bourse. In another fifteen minutes Muffat took his leave, and as Nana walked toward the door with him, he vainly entreated for a rendezvous the next night.

Steiner immediately afterward sulkily strode off to bed.

Nana found Georges behind the curtain in her room, which was dark. They laughed, and kissed each other over and over again, while Comte Muffat walked slowly along the highway, with his hat in his hand, and his burning brow bathed in all the freshness and silence of the night.

Nana, with her boy-lover, seemed to have found her fifteen years again. She was weary and disgusted with men, and this child seemed to have awakened her better nature. Her color came and went, tears filled her eyes, smiles hovered upon her lips—she was a very girl once more.

The country affected all her senses; as a child her fairest dreams of happiness had been to live in a meadow with a goat, because one day she had seen a goat on the fortifications tethered to a stake; and now all this land—which belonged to her very self, and far surpassing her wildest dreams, filled her with emotion. She was a girl once more; and at night, when weary with a day in the open air, intoxicated with the fresh breezy odor from the trees and grass, she went to find Georges behind the curtain, she fancied herself a school-girl, and trembled at the least noise, as if an angry parent were at her heels.

Nana had many sentimental fancies in these days. She looked at the moon for hours. One night she insisted on going down into the garden with him when the whole house was asleep, and they roamed through the broad walks or lay on the turf under the trees. Another time, after a long silence, she burst into wild sobs on the neck of the boy, and said she was afraid to die. She often sang in a low, soft voice, Madame Lerat's old romance, full of flowers and birds, and sang until the tears came, interrupting herself to clasp Georges in a passionate embrace, exacting from him oaths of eternal love. Then, at other times, she was herself again, smoking cigarettes with Georges in jolly companionship, kicking their heels against the floor as they talked.

But the final melting of this young woman's heart was caused by the arrival of her little Louis, who, with Madame Lerat, appeared on the scene. Her maternal tenderness, so lately awakened, was almost like insanity. She took the little fellow into the sunshine to see him kick and dance. She rolled on the grass with him, after dressing

him like a young prince. She insisted on his sleeping close to her in the adjoining room, where Madame Lerat snored as soon as she was on her back. And little Louis did Georges no harm; on the contrary, she said she now had two children, and enveloped them in the same capricious tenderness. That night she left Georges to see if Louis were well covered and breathed easily, but when she went back she bestowed on Georges the remains of her maternal tenderness. She played the mamma while he allowed himself to be rocked and caressed like a baby.

Things attained to such a point, that she, enraptured by the country, proposed seriously never to leave the country again. She would send everybody else away, and they two, with Louis, would live there together, it would be delicious. And they made an infinity of promises to each other until breakfast, hearing nothing of Madame Lerat's snores as she lay on her back, dreaming of gathering wild flowers.

This charming life existed for a week. Comte Muffat appeared every night and went away with sullen face, and burning hands.

One evening he was not even received, Steiner having made a trip to Paris. Muffat was told that Madame was far from well.

Nana revolted more than ever each day against the idea of any infidelity to Georges. Poor little fellow! so innocent as he was, and trusting her so entirely, that he would have regarded herself as the lowest of the low did she betray him. Zoé looked on in disdain and silence at this adventure, thinking that Madame was certainly losing her senses.

On the sixth day a band of visitors fell into this idyl. Nana had invited a quantity of people, not thinking they would come, and was therefore considerably surprised and disgusted when an omnibus, loaded down, drew up before the gate.

"Here we are!" cried Mignon, who was the first to appear, with his sons Henri and Charles. Labordette came next, and assisted an interminable file of ladies—Lucy Stewart, Caroline Héquet, Tatan Néné, Maria Blond. Nana thought these were all, when La Faloise jumped out and received into his trembling arms, Gaga and her

daughter Amélié, which made eleven persons; to install whom was a work of some difficulty. There were but five guest-rooms, one of which was occupied already by Madame Lerat and little Louis. The largest was given to Gaga and La Faloise, while Amélié slept in a dressing-room on a cot-bed; Mignon and his two sons were together; Laborderte the fourth, while the fifth was arranged as a dormitory, with four beds, for Lucy, Caroline, Tatan and Maria. As to Steiner, he slept on the divan in the salon.

At the end of an hour or two all this was properly arranged, and Nana, at first sadly out of temper, was by that time quite charmed at the idea of playing Chatelaine. These ladies congratulated her on the possession of this place.

"A most valuable piece of property, my dear," they said.

They brought a puff of Parisian air, and all the gossip of the last week, talking all at once, with laughs, exclamations and little jokes. And Bordenave—what was he doing? and what had he said of her departure?

Well! not much. After swearing that she should be brought back by the police, he had, when night came, put little Violaine into her shoes, who had obtained as Venus a very great success. This news made Nana very serious.

It was only four o'clock. They talked of taking a little walk.

"I was gathering potatoes," said Nana, "when you arrived."

Then they all wished to gather potatoes; without the delay of a moment, they sallied forth. The gardener and two aids were in the field at the further end of the estate. These ladies went down on their knees, putting their ringed fingers into the earth, uttering little cries of delight whenever they found an especially large potato. It seemed to them a most amusing game. Here Tatan Néné triumphed; she had in her youth gathered so many potatoes that she forgot herself, and gave advice to the others, treating them as ignoramuses.

The gentlemen worked with less energy. Mignon, in the most good-natured way, profited by his sojourn in the country to complete the education of his sons; he talked to them of Botany and other improving subjects.

The dinner that evening was wildly gay. Nana had consulted with her maître d'hotel, a fellow whom Steiner had engaged, and who had formerly served the Bishop of Orléans. The ladies lighted their cigars, and smoked with their coffee. The noise filled the summer air. The peasants gathered in the distance, and watched the house, every window of which blazed with lights.

"It is too stupid that you must go so soon," said Nana, "and we must arrange something for to-morrow!"

The next day was Sunday, and they decided to visit the ruins of the ancient Abbaye de Chamont, which was some seven kilometres away. Five carriages came from Orléans to take the party immediately after breakfast, and would bring them back again to dinner at seven. This would be charming.

This evening, as usual, Comte Muffat climbed the hill to ring at the gate, but the brightly lighted windows, the voices, and the gay peals of laughter astonished him. He presently, however, understood, as he caught the tones of Mignon's voice, and went off in a fit of rage at this new obstacle, vowing to himself that he would be patient no longer.

Georges opened the small gate, of which he had the key, and quietly stole up to Nana's room, where she found him when she entered long after midnight, a little tipsy, but very maternal. She insisted on his accompanying them the next day; but he refused, feeling certain that he would be seen and recognized; his mother, he said, had begun to suspect something, and were he to be seen in the carriage with her, there would be no end of a scandal. But she burst into tears with the overwhelming despair of a woman who feels that she has been sacrificed, and he consoled her, finally saying that he would accede to her wishes, and be of the party.

"Then you love me," she murmured. "Tell me that you love me dearly. Tell me that if I were to die, that it would grieve you sorely."

CHAPTER X.

REWARD OF VIRTUE.

THE vicinity of Nana to Fondettes disturbed the whole house. Each morning, dear good Madame Hujon persistently returned to the subject of this woman—repeating all her gardener had told her—bewitched, as honest women frequently are, by these *filles*. She—so tolerant by nature, was indignant and disgusted—haunted by a vague presentiment of misfortune—as much disturbed, in short, as if she had just been informed of the presence in the country, of some wild beast, escaped from some menagerie. She attacked her guests, accusing them of haunting the environs of La Mignotte. She pretended to laugh, when in the afternoon, these gentlemen disappeared, one after the other.

The Comte de Vandeuvres had been seen laughing and talking with a lady on the public highway, but he denied that it was Nana; and he told the truth, for it was Lucy with whom he had been walking—that Lucy who had just dismissed her second Prince, and whom he now thought of taking back to Paris.

As to the Marquis de Chouard—he took a good deal of out-door exercise, by the advice of his physician, he said. To Daguenet and Fauchéry, Madame Hujon was unjust—for the first never left Les Fondettes, but hovered around Estelle.

Fauchéry, too, was always with the Muffat ladies. Once he had met Mignon in a lane, who, with his sons, and his arms full of flowers, was out on a botanical excursion. The two men shook hands, and a few words in regard to Rose were exchanged. She was well; they had each received that same morning a letter, in which she entreated them to reap a little more benefit from the country air, because she was still so very busy in Paris.

As Comte Muffat was absent the greater part of every day on pretext of important business at Orléans, Fauchéry

was the cavalier of the Countess. When they walked out in the Park, he carried her folding-chair and her parasol. She was amused by the Journalist's quick wit—by his original manner of speaking of men and things—and one of those sudden intimacies, authorized by this easy life of the country, was gradually forming between them.

She invited it from the first. She was gay and in the best of spirits, seeming to have snatched back a portion of her fleeting youth, in the companionship of this young man, whose mocking, wayward nature was not likely to compromise her.

But sometimes, when they were a little apart, their eyes would meet—they would stop in the middle of a sentence, or of a laugh, and become suddenly serious, with a gloomy retrospective look, as if they were seeking to comprehend themselves and each other.

Of all the inmates of her house, Madame Hujon spared only Comte Muffat and Georges; the Comte was too much occupied with weighty business at Orléans, to run after any woman, and as to Georges, he was far from well, and his mother was really anxious about him. Each evening he had these same frightful headaches, which compelled him to take shelter in his own room.

On Thursday a new guest appeared—Monsieur Theophile Vénot—whom the old lady remembered to have asked in the middle of the winter. He glided about, and affected the manner of a man who believed himself to be too insignificant to be noticed, and did not appear to observe the uneasy deference which was shown him. When he succeeded in making himself forgotten, he sat and crunched bits of sugar at dessert, all the time watching Daguenet, who was serving Estelle to strawberries, and listening to Fauchéry, who was greatly amusing the Comtesse with an anecdote he was telling.

When any one looked at him, Vénot smiled in the most amiable manner. After dinner, he slipped his arm through that of the Count, and led him off into the Park. Every one knew that Vénot, ever since the death of the Count's mother, had obtained over him the greatest possible influence. Most singular tales were in circulation in regard to the domination exercised in the Muffat mansion by the

old lawyer. Fauchéry, who was considerably annoyed by his arrival, took pains to explain to Georges and Daguenet the source of his fortune, which came from a great lawsuit he had gained for the Jesuits; and went on to say, that this gentleman, for all his bland and gentle manners, was in reality a most formidable personage, and deeply involved in all the dark and dirty work of the Priesthood.

The two young men laughed at this statement, for they thought the little old man very simple. The idea of a mysterious Vénot—of a formidable Vénot—working quietly in the interests of the clergy, struck them as the most imaginative and preposterous tale. But they thought differently a little later, when Comte Muffat appeared with a downcast air, and eyes that looked as if he had been shedding tears.

"I should think they had been talking of the infernal regions!" murmured Fauchéry.

The Comtesse Sabine, who had heard him, turned her head slowly, and their eyes met with one of those long looks which they hazarded occasionally.

Generally, after breakfast, the party assembled on a terrace that overlooked the plain. Sunday afternoon was deliciously mild; at ten o'clock in the morning they had feared rain, but the sky brightened without clearing, and a luminous mist lay over the river and the hills.

Madame Hujon proposed to go out of the little door in the wall and take a walk on the river side. She being very active for her sixty years, enjoyed walking. All her guests professed to be pleased at this proposition, and they started forth. They wandered forth in no regular order, until they reached the wooden bridge thrown across the river. Fauchéry and Daguenet were in advance with the Comtesse and her daughter; the Comte and the Marquis were with Madame Hujon, while Vandeuvres, looking quite stately and a little bored, brought up the rear with a cigar in his mouth.

Monsieur Vénot, sometimes quickening his pace and sometimes moving more slowly, went from one group to the other with his usual faint, ambiguous smile on his lips.

"Yes, poor Georges is at Orléans," repeated Madame

Hujon. "He wished to consult a physician in regard to these perpetual headaches, and old Dr. Boutarel goes out no more. Before you were up, any of you, he was off—it must have been before seven o'clock."

She interrupted herself.

"What are they doing on the bridge?—why are they stopping there?"

The two ladies with Daguenet and Fauchéry were at the end of the bridge, standing in a hesitating sort of way, as if some obstacle were in front, and yet the road was perfectly unobstructed.

"Go on!" called the Comte.

But they did not move: the road turned abruptly here, and was so sheltered by a thick row of poplars that they could see what the others could not. A dull sound was heard, which sound gradually increased—a rattling of wheels, voices and laughter, mingled with the snapping of whips. All at once five carriages appeared closely following each other, and each crowded until it could hold no more, with the most voyante toilettes of blue and pink.

"What on earth is it?" said Madame Hujon, in great surprise.

But all at once the truth flashed over her, and she paused in disgust at this irruption.

"Oh! that woman!" she murmured. "Go on—go on, I beg of you! Don't look as if—"

But there was no time—the five carriages in which Nana and her friends were on their way to visit the ruins of Chamont, were now upon the bridge. Fauchéry, Daguenet, and the Muffat ladies, were compelled to draw back, while Madame Hujon and the others drew up also at the side of the narrow bridge. It was really an imposing procession. The voices had ceased in the carriages—every face was turned curiously toward them—not a sound except the measured trot of the horses on the sounding planks was heard.

In the first carriage Maria Blond and Tatan Néné, reclining like Duchesses, with their skirts swelling out over the wheels, had only looks of disdain for the ladies whom they saw on foot.

Gaga filled another low carriage. The nose of La

Faloise alone could be seen amid her voluminous drapery Then came Caroline Héquet with Labordette, Lucy Stewart with Mignon and his boys, and at the last appeared Nana with Steiner in a Victoria, and on the seat opposite, looking admiringly at her, was poor Georges.

"That is the one, is it not?" asked the Comtesse, quietly, turning to Fauchéry, and pretending not to recognize Nana.

The wheels of the carriage almost touched her, but she stood her ground. The two women exchanged a searching glance—one of those momentary examinations which, though brief, are definitive. As to the men, they were unmoved. Fauchéry and Daguenet were cold and calm, and seemed to recognize no one. The Marquis was uneasy, dreading he knew not what on the part of these actresses, and was snapping a twig nervously which he held between his fingers. Vandeuvres, alone and a little in the rear, saluted with an almost imperceptible motion of his eyelids, the fair Lucy, who smiled at him as she passed.

"Take care!" Monsieur Vénot had murmured in the ear of Comte Muffat, as they stood side by side.

Muffat, deadly pale, watched this vision of Nana as it came and went. His wife slowly turned, and was, in her turn, watching him. He then looked down on the ground, as if to escape from the resounding gallop of the horses that were carrying away his very heart and marrow.

He could have cried out with rage when he saw Georges nearly enveloped in Nana's skirts. Steiner was nothing; he did not matter; but that she could have preferred that child to him cut him to the heart.

At first Madam Hujon did not recognize Georges, who, as they crossed the bridge, would gladly have thrown himself into the river, had not a feeling of intense shame withheld him. Another idea struck him, but he was too late: he would have liked to hide himself among Nana's skirts. But he was literally paralyzed, and could not move. This unexpected meeting had taken away all his strength; he was cold as ice, and white as a sheet, sitting very stiffly, and looking neither to the right nor the left. Perhaps they would not see him, he thought.

"Good heavens!" said the old lady, suddenly, "that is Georges with her!"

The carriage passed between these people, who knew each other, and yet did not dare to speak or bow. This rencontre, brief as it was, seemed almost eternal; and yet the rolling wheels had already borne far away into the warm, sunny country, these gay, laughing women, with their floating ribbons, veils and scarfs. They glanced back at these ladies and gentlemen standing, vexed and disturbed, along the roadside. Nana turned around, and saw that they hesitated a moment, and then turned back, without crossing the bridge—Madame Hujon, leaning on the arm of Comte Muffat, so silent and sad, that no one dared offer consolation.

"Did you see Fauchéry?" Nana cried out to Lucy, leaning toward the next carriage. "Did you see Fauchéry, my dear? He is a nice fellow, not to bow to us! He shall pay for that. And Paul too—a fellow to whom I have been so kind. Not the slightest indication of ever having seen us before. They are certainly polite!"

And thereupon she had a frightful scene with Steiner, who declared that these gentlemen were quite in the right. So, then, she did not deserve that these men should lift their hats to her. Was this what he meant? Any conceited popinjay was to insult her, was he? Thanks; he was as civil as the others. In her opinion a man should bow to a woman under any circumstances.

"And that tall creature, who was she?" asked Lucy, her voice nearly lost in the roll of the wheels.

"The Comtesse Muffat," answered Steiner.

"So I supposed," said Nana. "Ah, well! She is not much, if she is a Countess. No, indeed, not much. You know I have eyes, and I can read her as well as if I had made her. This Countess of yours is no better than she should be; and this, Fauchéry is aware of, quite as fully as I. I tell you I know; women can read each other."

Steiner shrugged his shoulders. He was in none too amiable a mood; his ill-humor had been on the increase ever since the previous evening, when he had received a letter which obliged him to return to town the next morning;

besides, it is not especially agreeable to go to the country, and sleep on a sofa in the salon.

"And this poor little fellow!" said Nana, suddenly softening, as she noticed the boy's quick breathing and startling pallor.

"Do you think mamma recognized me?" he said, at last.

"Recognized you! Of course she did. She uttered an exclamation. And it is all my fault; for you did not wish to come, and I made you. Listen, Georges. Shall I write to your mamma? She has a most respectable air. I will tell her that I never saw you before—that Steiner brought you to-day for the first time."

"No; no; don't write!" said Georges, more and more uneasy. "I will settle the affair myself; and then, if they worry me, I won't go home at all!"

But he fell into a fit of abstraction, inventing falsehoods for the evening. The five carriages rolled gently over the plain, through a straight, interminable road, shaded by tall, fine trees. The air—a tangible silvery mist—was sweet and fresh. The ladies continued to call from carriage to carriage over the shoulders of the coachmen, who laughed in their sleeves at these strange people; occasionally one of them rose to her feet to see something, and steadied herself by a hand on the next shoulder, lest a sudden lurch of the carriage should throw her out. Caroline Héquet, meanwhile, was deep in conversation with Labordette. Each agreed in the belief that Nana would sell this place before she had had it three months, and Caroline bade Labordette buy it for her at a bargain.

Before them La Faloise, sentimentally inclined, sat by Gaga's apoplectic side, and stealthily kissed her fat arm, over which the stuff of her dress was stretched so tightly that it cracked, while Amélie, stiff and erect on the front seat, bade them be quiet.

In the other carriage, Mignon, aided by Lucy, was making his sons recite some of La Fontaine's fables. Henri was quite remarkable in his memory and fluency. Maria Blond, at the head of this cortége, soon wearied of imposing the most preposterous falsehoods on this stick

of a Tatan Néné, whom she had told that at the dairies in Paris, eggs were made out of glue and saffron.

"How much farther did they have to go?" and this question, transmitted from carriage to carriage, reached Nana, who, having questioned her coachman, called out:

"It is only another fifteen minutes. You see that church there behind the trees?"

Then after a little she resumed:

"You don't know, perhaps, that the proprietress of the Château de Chamont was a bright and shining light in the time of Napoleon—a real high flyer, they say; but now a-days she thinks only of clergymen and religion."

"What is her name" asked Lucy.

"Madame d'Anglars."

"Irma d'Anglars! I have known her," cried Gaga, whereupon from all the carriages came a flood of questions. Everybody stretched out to see Gaga. Maria Blond and Tatan Néné turned and knelt on the seat, with their arms on the back, filled with interest, curiosity and admiration. Gaga had known her, and these women were all struck with respect for this distant past.

"Yes, I was very young at the time," said Gaga, "but I used to see her pass in her carriage. She was quite imposing, but it was said that at home she did not amount to much. But such tales as were told of her! I don't wonder that she has a château. She gathered up and kept all the money that ever came in her way. And Irma d'Anglars lives still! Well, well! Do you know, my dears, that she must be ninety years old."

These ladies all at once became very serious. Ninety years old! There was not one of them, as Lucy declared, who wished to live to be that age. Nana said she did not care to make old bones. This conversation was interrupted by the cracking of the coachmen's whips. They had arrived.

Lucy had commenced a series of energetic entreaties that Nana should return with them to Paris the following day. The Exposition was on the point of closing, and they ought to be in Paris again; the season had surpassed their expectations and hopes.

But Nana shook her head. She hated Paris, and she did not mean to go there very soon.

"No, indeed; we will stay here," she said to Georges, with a tender look, not troubling herself in the least about Steiner.

The carriages stopped suddenly. The party alighted in a wild, deserted spot on a side hill. One of the coachmen pointed out with his whip the ruins of the old Abbaye de Chamont, half concealed among the trees. It was a gross deception; the ladies said so frankly. A few stones piled on top of another, rusty and weather-stained. This sight was surely not worth driving two leagues for. The coachman then showed them the château, the park of which commenced near the abbey. He told them to take a narrow path which ran close to the walls. They would like this walk, and let the carriages wait for them in the village square.

It was said to be a charming walk, and the party all agreed to attempt it.

"Well! upon my life, Irma is comfortably settled," said Gaga, stopping before a gate in the corner of the park.

They all looked up in silence at the heavy mass of foliage, admiring the trees whose branches met over the road, making a thick, green, vaulted roof above their heads.

At the end of another five minutes they stood before a second gate, through which they could see a large lawn shaded by two century-old oaks; and five minutes more beheld them at still another gate where an enormous avenue stretched before them, at the end of whose dark shadows they caught a yellow point of sunlight.

Their silent astonishment was here transformed into loud exclamations of envy and admiration. What a woman Irma was! The trees continued. They passed through gate after gate. They passed long ivy-covered walls; tall poplars, shading peaked roofs; clumps of elms and aspens. Would these grounds never come to an end?

The ladies wished to see the house, but were growing tired of wandering without arriving at anything save new stretches of meadows and trees.

They leaned against an iron gate, and looked with respect at the immensity of space, beyond which this

château lay. They began also to feel physically weary. The gray stone wall was constantly reappearing at unexpected angles. Some of the party began to murmur, and talked of retracing their footsteps. But the more weary they were, the more impressed they became, by the calm and royal majesty of this domain.

"It is stupid to the last degree!" muttered Caroline, through her teeth.

Nana admonished her to silence with a look. She herself had become very silent, serious, and even a little pale. Suddenly at a turn they emerged—as one does upon a village square—into an open space, at the further side of which stood the château surrounded by a *cour d' honneur*, and shut in by a huge gate of wrought iron. They all stopped, struck by the height of the steps, the width of the balconies, the long windows, and the wide-spread wings whose bricks were framed in stone.

Henri Quatre had slept in this historical château, and the bed, hung with curtains of Genoa velvet, on which he had laid his august head, was standing in the room he had occupied.

Nana was half suffocated.

"Merciful heavens!" she said, half aloud.

But she was not the only one overwhelmed by emotion. Gaga suddenly said:

"There is Irma herself at the chapel door!"

Gaga recognized her at once in spite of the lapse of years. She was as erect as ever, and her head held as loftily. Vespers were just over; Madame lingered under the porch. She wore a silk costume—very simple in style, and very magnificent in quality—the color of a faded leaf, and had the face and air of an old marquise escaped from the horrors of the Revolution. In her right hand a large prayer-book glittered in the sun. She slowly came down the path followed by a lacquey in livery. The chapel emptied itself. All the inhabitants of the village of Chamont bowed deeply to her as they passed. One old man kissed her hand; a woman tried to kneel at her feet. She was a powerful Queen crowned by years and honors. She mounted the steps of the château; the door opened and closed upon her.

"This is the reward of right doing!" said Mignon, solemnly to his sons, as if he were reading them a moral lesson.

Then each had his word to say. Labordette thought her wonderfully preserved. Maria Blond uttered a few words which certainly were not especially choice, whereat Lucy waxed angry, and said that age and gray hairs should always be respected, and all agreed that Irma was a most extraordinary person.

They drove to La Mignotte almost in silence. Nana never spoke. She turned three times to look back at the château. Lulled by the motion of the carriage, she seemed neither to feel Steiner at her side, nor to see Georges opposite her. A vision flitted before her eyes, and she beheld naught save Madame with her queenly air, and her crown of years and honors.

That evening Georges went back to Fondettes for dinner. Nana was more fastidious than usual, and insisted that the boy should ask his mother's pardon. "It must be done," she said, with the most matronly severity, suddenly impressed by great respect for family ties. She told him that he was not to come back again that night. He must think only of obedience, and of pleasing his mother.

Georges was considerably annoyed at this unexpected lesson in morality, but entered his mother's presence with a full heart and hanging head. Fortunately his brother Philippe had arrived, which prevented the scene he had feared. Madame Hujon contented herself with looking at him with eyes full of tears, while Philippe, who had received a hint of the state of things, told him that if he went near that woman again, he would drag him home by his ears. Georges, with a sense of relief, at once began to calculate at what hour he could best make his escape the next day and fly again to Nana.

The dinner at Fondettes was not gay: there was certain restraint. Vandeuvres had announced his departure for the next morning. He wanted to accompany Lucy back to Paris, being in a state of surprise and excitement at the sudden passion he had conceived for this woman whom he had known for ten years and never especially admired.

The Marquis de Chouard, with his head bent over his

plate was thinking of Gaga's daughter. He remembered having called her Lilli in her childhood and held her on his knee, but now she was Mademoiselle Amélié. How children do grow up, and grow pretty too!

But Comte Muffat was more silent and self-absorbed than any one else. His face was suffused, and he watched Georges with eyes in which burned a lurid flame. He shivered occasionally, and when dinner was over spoke of retiring to his room to nurse himself and shake off this feverish attack.

But Monsieur Vénot followed him, and an extraordinary scene took place above stairs. The Comte threw himself on his bed, and stifled with his pillows a paroxysm of nervous sobs, while Monsieur Vénot stood by him, and in a low, gentle voice called him brother, and urged him to ask Divine mercy and aid. The Comte hardly heard these words. Suddenly he started up.

"I am going!" he exclaimed. "I cannot—"

"Very well!" murmured Monsieur Vénot, "I shall go with you."

As they went out two shadows flitted across the dark avenue. Every evening Fauchéry and the Comtesse Sabine left Daguenet to assist Estelle and Madame Hujon to prepare tea. The Comte walked so fast that his companion was forced to run to keep up with him. In spite of his haste and scantness of breath, Vénot did not cease to present the best and most forcible arguments against the temptations of the flesh, but the Comte did not open his mouth. When he reached Mignotte, he said:

"It is no use. I cannot help it. Leave me!"

"The will of God be done!" answered Monsieur Vénot, "He takes strange ways to ensure His own triumph Your sin will be His strength."

At Mignotte, dinner had been enlivened by considerable quarrelling. Nana had found a letter from Bordenave awaiting her, in which he advised her to prolong her holiday—his letter had the air almost of a dismissal. Little Violaine had been recalled several times each evening.

And as Mignon urged her to go back with them the next day, Nana lost her temper, and declared that she wanted none of his advice. She had appeared at the table with a

dress so noticeably close to her throat, that Madame Lerat uttered a remark that was in very bad taste; whereat Nana exclaimed angrily that no one, not even her aunt, should say such vile things at her table. She then proceeded to astonish her guests by her noble sentiments, and by the notions she advanced of a religious education for Louis, and a life of order and decorum for herself. When they laughed, she went on to say, with an air of profound conviction, that economy was the highest of all virtues, and that she did not mean to die in an almshouse. The women were stung at this, and asked her, sharply, what on earth had got into her? But Nana only shook her head wisely. She knew what she meant, and she meant what she said, and had excellent reasons she added; and at once relapsed into a reverie—seeing before her a vision of a Nana grown old—much respected and very wealthy. They were about retiring for the night when Muffat appeared. Labordette had found him in the garden, and quickly understanding the state of things, he kindly got Steiner out of the way, and led him by the hand through dark corridors and winding staircase to Nana's presence.

Labordette in such matters was adroit and kind, delighting to make others happy. Nana was not surprised; but was unaffectedly annoyed by this mad, reckless passion which Muffat evinced for her. Life was a serious thing, she said, and it was foolish to love—it led to nothing. She had scruples, too, on account of Georges' youth. She was not doing right, she said to herself. She would retrace her steps, and take an old man as her lover.

"Zoé," she said to her maid, who listened with delight, "pack the trunks early in the morning, and we will return to Paris."

CHAPTER XI.

ABASEMENT AND HUMILIATION.

THREE months later, one December evening, Comte Muffat was walking through the Passage des Panoramas. The evening was very mild, and a sudden shower had filled the place with people. There was such a crowd that it was difficult to make one's way between the shops. There was a blaze of light amid colored glasses, red lanterns, white globes and blue transparencies—there were long lines of gas high up, gigantic fans and watches catching the light, the gold of the jewellers, the crystallized sugar in the windows of the confectioners, the gay silk and ribbons of the modiste—all showed through the clear panes of glass, while among the signs a huge crimson glove swung like a great bloody hand cut off and encircled by a yellow cuff.

Slowly and thoughtfully Comte Muffat took his way to the Boulevard. He stood a moment looking about, and then returned at a very slow pace, keeping close to the shop windows.

The warmth and the heavy air created a slight mist in the narrow passage. Along the pavement, wet with the constant dripping of umbrellas, steps resounded, but no voices were heard. People, as they passed, looked at this face paled by the strong light of the gas. Then the Comte, annoyed by the persistency of these glances, planted himself at the window of a stationer, and contemplated, with an air of intense interest, a display of paper weights, mostly glass balls, ornamented with flowers and landscapes.

He saw nothing. He was thinking of Nana. Why had she lied to him again? That morning she had written to him not to come to her that evening, for Louis was quite ill, and she should spend the night at Batignolles to assist in taking care of him.

But he, somewhat suspicious, called at her house, and

learned through the concierge that Madame had that moment gone to the theatre. This astonished him, as the Blonde Venus had been withdrawn, and Nana was not in the new piece. Why had she lied? And what was she doing at the Variétés that evening?

Hustled by the passers-by, the Comte quite unconsciously deserted the stationer's, and found himself before the window of a toy shop, examining intently a display of pocket-books and cigar-holders, all of which bore in the corner the same blue swallow.

Nana was certainly changed. On her first return from the country she had driven him wild by her kisses and by her words of endearment. He had then no further fear of Georges, whom his mother kept at Les Fondettes, and who was compelled to write beautiful letters, to which Nana, quite touched by their eloquence, replied in the choicest language.

There was Steiner, to be sure, of whom he wished to get rid; but he hesitated before the esclandre, which he knew must take place. He knew that the Banker was raising money in every possible way, and Nana said she could not quarrel with him abruptly after the prodigious amount he had spent for her.

For the last three months Comte Muffat had lived in a perpetual state of feverish excitement, looking neither to the Future nor to the Past. The tardy awakening of his senses, like the gluttony of a child, left no room for vanity or jealousy. One thing only struck him clearly. Nana was certainly less tender. This disturbed him; he asked himself with what she could reproach him; he certainly knew little of women, and he might have erred unwittingly, and yet he thought he had gratified all her wishes, and this brought him back to her letter of the morning—to this falsehood—told apparently for the simple reason that she wished to spend an evening at the theatre. By this time a new pressure of the crowd had sent him across the passage, and he stood before a restaurant, with his eyes fixed on some larded larks and a huge salmon.

Then he started, and, looking up, perceived that it was nine o'clock. Nana would soon be coming out, and he would ascertain the truth. He walked on, thinking of

the long hours that he had passed there so many nights when she was playing, and he joined her when she left the theatre. He was familiar with all these shops; he recognized their various odors in this damp air, above the smell of gas. The strong scent of Russia leather; the perfume of Vanilla rising from the basement of a chocolate maker; the breath of musk coming from out the doors of the perfumers; but he did not dare linger before these Dames de Comptoir, who looked at him calmly as if they knew him. He looked up to the upper story above the shops, and seemed to study that long row of round windows, as if he saw them for the first time.

Again he went to the Boulevard, and stood there a few minutes. The rain was now falling in a fine mist, the chill of which on his hands seemed to calm him. He thought of his wife who was near Maçon in a château, where her friend Madame de Chézelles had been very ill ever since the autumn. The carriages that passed were rolling through the mud. What must it be in the country in this weather?

Suddenly he started and returned to the close, warm passage, hurrying along, stung by the thought that if Nana distrusted him, she could disappear through the Galérie Montmartre.

The Comte took his stand at the door of the theatre; he was reluctant to wait here, where he feared recognition. But at the angle made by the Galérie des Variétés and the Galérie Saint-Marc was a dark corner occupied by a shoe-store, and a shop of dusty, second-hand furniture—a reading-room thick with smoke, whose very lamps seemed asleep. Here several well-dressed men were watching the door through which emerged some of the artists, as well as the ragged figurantes and tipsy mechanics. Before the theatre one solitary gas-burner in a cut-glass globe blazed above the door. Muffat thought for a moment of going in and questioning Madame Bron. It was barely possible that Nana had gone, but he reflected that were she still in the theatre, the concierge would certainly warn her of his appearance, on which she as certainly would disappear.

He walked up and down, therefore, and determined not to leave until the gates were closed, as he had before done

than once done. The idea of going home without seeing Nana made him feel sick and faint.

Women with shawls drawn over their heads, and dirty-faced men, glanced at him as they passed. He turned away and looked in at this reading-room, where between two placards pasted on the window-pane he found always the same uninteresting spectacle, of one little old man, sitting stiff and erect at an immense table under the green light of a shaded lamp, reading a green newspaper, which he held in green hands.

About ten o'clock another gentleman, tall, fair, and with exquisitely fitting gloves, appeared, and also walked up and down before the theatre. Then the two men glanced at each other every time they turned with a distrustful, suspicious air. The Comte examined the new-comer in a mirror that was hung out at the old furniture shop, and, seeing his high-bred air, felt a certain fear not unmingled with shame.

The clock struck ten. Muffat suddenly thought that it after all would be very easy to ascertain if Nana were in her dressing-room. He ran up the three steps, crossed the little vestibule picked out in yellow, and slipped into the court-yard through a door that was simply latched. At this hour this court-yard—small, ill smelling, and damp as a well from its dripping hydrant—and the accumulated rubbish with which the concierge had encumbered it, was filled with a noxious vapor that was almost tangible; but the two immense walls were set thick with windows, blazing with lights. All the offices of the theatre were on the lower floor, while above, were the dressing-rooms of the actresses. These windows along this dark and narrow court-yard looked almost like the mouths of fiery furnaces. The Comte saw the light in Nana's dressing-room, and, quite relieved and content, stood looking at it in all the dirt and filth of this back-yard. The gutter dripped upon his head: he did not feel it. A gleam of light from Madame Bron's window lighted a bit of the mouldy pavement—a corner of the stone wall worn away by the water from a sink, and a pile of old dilapidated buckets. There was a sudden creak of a door, and the Comte hurried away.

Certainly Nana must soon come down. He walked

toward the reading-room again. The old man did not seem to have moved. He then began again his monotonous pacing to and fro, meeting at each turn the tall, fair man, who glanced at him with a triumphant air.

The Comte at last pushed his walk further, crossed the Grande Galérie, and followed that of the Variétés to the Galérie Feydeau, which was cold, solitary and dark; then coming back he again passed the theatre and went as far as the Galérie Montmartre, where a machine grinding spices at a grocer's interested him momentarily.

But at the third turn the thought that Nana might disappear behind his back caused him to lose all self-respect. He planted himself by the side of the other gentleman before the theatre. The two exchanged a look of fraternal humility mingled with a little vague distrust, caused by the thought of a possible rivalry.

Some machinists, who went out to smoke a pipe in the entr'acte, jostled against him, but neither he nor they had any right to complain. Three tall girls, with untidy hair and ragged garments, appeared eating apples and spitting out the cores, and the two gentlemen turned away shocked by the expression of their faces and the coarseness of their words, as well as incensed by the rough manner in which these creatures, who seemed to think it an excellent joke, pushed against them as they passed.

Just then Nana came down the three steps. She turned very pale as she saw Muffat.

"You here!" she stammered.

The figurantes, who were giggling, instantly stopped and stood in a line quiet and serious, like servants who are surprised by madame while committing some dire fault. The blond man walked off with a saddened look.

"Well! give me your arm," said Nana, impatiently.

They walked slowly away. The Comte, who had prepared certain questions, had nothing to say. It was she who rapidly explained that she had been at her aunt's until eight o'clock, and then finding her child much better decided to go to the theatre.

"On important business?" he asked.

"Yes; a new piece," she answered, with some little hesitation. "They wanted my opinion."

He felt that she was uttering a falsehood, but the soft, warm arm which was passed through his, deprived him of all strength. He felt now neither anger nor desire to revenge himself for his long season of waiting. His only idea was to keep her, now that he had got her. The next day he would try and know what she was doing in her dressing-room at that hour.

Nana was uneasy, and had that uncertain, absent manner common to persons who are trying to make up their minds to take some step. She stopped suddenly before a shop where fans were displayed.

"Look!" she murmured, "that is very pretty: the mother-of-pearl with feathers."

Then with an air of affected indifference, she said:

"Do you mean to go home with me?"

"Certainly," he said, in some astonishment. "Your boy is better, is he not?"

She wished she could retract her statement. She hesitated and said that she felt uneasy, and should go to Batignolles to see how he was. But as he insisted on going with her, she gave up that idea. She was by this time in a state of white heat. She knew she was caught, but she did not dare be other than amiable, and therefore resigned herself and determined to gain time, and, if she could get rid of him before midnight, things would go very well.

"It is true, then, that your wife is still away," she said. "Does she come home to-morrow?"

"Yes," answered Muffat, coldly, for he was disturbed at hearing her speak of the Comtesse thus familiarly.

She leaned on his arm, and asked what hour the train arrived, and if he intended to go to the station to meet his wife. She walked slowly, as if interested in the shops.

"Look!" she exclaimed, stopping in front of a jeweler's. "What an odd bracelet!"

Nana adored this Passage des Panoramas. It was a passion which was a lingering remnant of her youth, when she liked all imitations, false jewelry, gilded tin, and paper mockery of leather. She found it no easier in these later days to pass these shop-windows than it was when as a child she dragged her slip-shod shoes along, forgetting

herself before a confectioner's, listening to a hand-organ in the toy-shop, and fascinated by the knick-knacks she saw, the gilded nuts, the little hods of the chiffonnier intended for toothpicks, the Vendome columns and obelisks doing duty as thermometers. But this evening she did not see anything. She was annoyed at not being free, and in her sullen revolt was in great danger as she felt, of making some frightful blunder.

She needed money. That of the Prince and Steiner had vanished like snow before the sun, and she had no idea where it had gone. Her apartment in the Boulevard Haussmann had not been yet entirely furnished. The salon in red satin alone was completed, and that was too crowded and too loud. At this very time she had not a sou, and her creditors were tormenting her worse than ever. She could not comprehend her destitution, for she considered herself a model of prudence and economy.

That wretch of a Steiner never brought her a note for a thousand francs, except on those days when she had declared that she would not receive him without them.

As to Muffat, he was an idiot. Ah! how weary she was of all these people, and how gladly she would have left them all, but for the conviction that this was her only road to fortune. She must be consistent and sensible. Zoé told her so every morning, and she said so to herself—at the same time, having before her like a religious souvenir, the vision she had beheld of that stately châtelaine of Chamont, and this was why, notwithstanding the restrained anger which caused her arm to tremble, she was so gentle and submissive to the Comte as she went from window to window.

The sidewalk without was drying rapidly. A fresh wind swept through the Galérie, causing the gigantic fan and the glove, as well as the other fantastic signs, to wave wildly to and fro.

At the door of the restaurant, a waiter was extinguishing the lights, while within, the *dames de comptoir* were so motionless that they seemed to be asleep with their eyes open.

"Oh! the love!" cried Nana, stopping to lavish this

epithet upon a little biscuit-hare whose paw was uplifted before a nest hidden among the roses.

They at last left the passage, and she refused to take a carriage. It was a lovely night, she said, and as there was no haste she preferred to walk. When she reached the Café Anglais she had a new caprice, and wanted some oysters, saying she had eaten nothing since the morning on account of the illness of her child. Muffat did not dare oppose her, but, as he did not care to show himself with her, he asked for a private room and hurried her along the corridors.

She followed with the air of a woman who knows the ground she treads upon, and they were about to enter a cabinet, the door of which was held open by a waiter, when from a neighboring salon came a perfect clamor of voices laughing and shouting. A man suddenly dashed out. It was Daguenet.

"Hallo! Nana!" he cried as he recognized her.

The Comte quickly disappeared into the cabinet, the door of which stood half open. But as he did so Daguenet winked at Nana with an air of intelligence, as he murmured:

"Zounds, my dear; you are coming on. You are taking your friends from the Tuileries now, I see!"

Nana smiled, and laid her finger on her lips as a signal for him to be quiet and cautious. She was glad to meet him, as she liked him in spite of what she considered his cowardice and meanness in refusing to recognize her when he was in the companionship of aristocratic women.

"I did not know what had become of you," she said.

"I am taking a solemn view of life just now," was his reply. "I am thinking of settling down and marrying."

She shrugged her shoulders with an air of pity. But he continued, saying, half laughing, that it was not living to make just about money enough at the Bourse to provide the women of his acquaintance with flowers and suppers. His three hundred thousand francs had lasted eighteen months. It was time for him to become practical, and marry a girl with a large dowry, and would end in becoming a Prefect like his father.

Nana smiled incredulously, and pointed to the salon he had just left.

"Whom have you there?" she asked.

"Oh, a whole lot," he cried, forgetting all his fine projects in his tipsy exhilaration. "Picture to yourself Leá describing her trip to Egypt. She is a great one! She tells a story about a bath."

And he began to tell the story. Nana waited complacently. They were each leaning against the wall, facing each other, in the narrow passage way. The heat was something fearful. The ceiling was low and the gas-burners numerous; an odor of cooking lingered among the hangings. In order to hear each other speak, they were obliged to put their faces quite close together. Every moment waiters hurried past, carrying trays. But Nana and her companion did not allow themselves to be disturbed, but stood as closely as possible to the wall, talking as comfortably amid this noise and confusion as if they had been in a quiet salon.

"Look!" murmured Daguenet, softly, and with a motion of his eyelids bade her glance at the door of the Cabinet, through which Muffat had disappeared.

They both looked; the door shivered a little, as if the wind from an open window disturbed it, and then, with excessive slowness it swung to, and shut without the smallest noise. They exchanged a silent laugh. The Comte must be having a good time in there all alone.

"Did you read Fauchéry's article on me?" asked Nana, suddenly.

"Yes; the Golden Fly, you mean," answered Daguenet. "I did not mention it to you, for I was afraid you did not like it."

"Not like it! Why not?" she answered, much astonished. "It was a very long article."

She was evidently much flattered that so much space was accorded to her in the *Figaro*. Had not her coiffeur Francis, explained it to her when he took her the Journal she would never have understood that it related to her, for her name did not appear.

Daguenet looked at her, as she spoke of the length of the article, with a very disagreeable little sneer. Of course

he said, if she was pleased, everybody else ought to be also.

"Excuse me," said a waiter, as he dashed between them, bearing in both hands a dish containing a *bombe glacée*.

Nana took a step toward the small salon where Muffat was waiting for her.

"Well, good-bye," said Daguenet. "Go and join your friend."

She stopped and turned back.

"Why do you sneer at him?"

"Because he deserves it."

She resumed her position leaning against the wall, her face evincing the greatest possible interest.

"What on earth do you mean?" she asked.

"Why, did you not know it?" he continued, lowering his voice. "His wife has taken Fauchéry as her friend my dear. It began in the country, I believe. Fauchéry left me just now, and I suspect that there is a rendezvous for this evening. She invented some story about a journey, I believe."

Nana did not speak for a moment. She was immensely excited.

"I knew it," she said at last, with considerable energy; "I was sure of it the very first time I saw her that day on the bridge, you remember. Can it be possible that an honest woman can deceive her husband for such a man as Fauchéry, too?"

"Oh!" muttered Daguenet, maliciously, "this is not her first step over the boundaries, you may be sure of that! Besides, I know it."

"Is that so?" answered Nana, with virtuous indignation. "Upon my word, this is a nice world, and nice people in it."

Another "excuse me," from a waiter carrying champagne bottles, again separated them.

Daguenet had taken her hand and held it for a moment, as he led her to the door of the small salon, and said in that rich voice, the tenderness of whose tones was the great secret of his success with women:

"Good-night, Chérie. You know that I adore you still!"

She withdrew her hand with a smile, and as a great shout came from the room where Daguenet's party were assembled, she said:

"Come and see me, then, some day, and we will talk about it."

Then becoming very grave, she added with the air of a respectable matron greatly shocked at the iniquity of the world:

"And he is deceived, is he? I always despised a man whose wife deceived, and was unfaithful to him."

When she entered the Cabinet, she saw Muffat seated on a narrow sofa, with a pale face, and hands that twitched nervously. He uttered no reproaches. She was herself considerably agitated, and divided between pity and contempt. This poor man whom a bad woman deceived so abominably!

She was tempted to throw her arms about him and console him. But, after all, it was right enough; he was such an idiot with women, and it might teach him a lesson. Pity him she did, however, and did not leave him after eating her oysters as she had intended.

They remained hardly a quarter of an hour after this in the Café Anglais, and then went to the Boulevard Haussmann. She was very gentle to him, and said much to demonstrate the folly of such excitement and mad passions as his. It was growing late, and she began to wish him to leave; she must be free at midnight.

She had prudently bidden Zoé remain in the ante-room, and had given her an order in a low voice.

"Remember," she said, "that he must make no noise, and you must keep him so long as the Comte is here."

"But where shall I put him, Madame?"

"In the kitchen, I think. It is the safest place."

A great fire blazed in the chimney when she entered the room, which was much the same as when our readers were first introduced, with its rosewood furniture, its curtains and coverings of broché damask of blue flowers on a gray ground. Nana had twice thought of refurnishing it; the first time in black velvet; the second in white satin; but as soon as Steiner consented and gave her the money, she

spent it in other ways; and since her elevation to notoriety and wealth, she had added to the contents of the room, only a tiger-skin before the chimney, and a crystal night-lamp hung from the ceiling.

"I am not sleepy," she said, "and have no intention of retiring."

The Comte did not oppose her, but submitted to her mandate with the air of a man who is afraid of dismissal. His first care was not to offend her.

He took his seat by the fire.

One of Nana's whims was to stand before her wardrobe, the door of which was one long mirror. She was in love with her own person, and gloried in each undulating line of her beautiful form, and in the satiny reflections of her skin, and always contemplated herself with this most serious admiration. Sometimes the coiffeur on coming in found her thus engrossed

This evening she lighted all the six candles, which stood on either side the Armoire in branches attached to it. But as she took her position before the mirror, she turned to the Comte and said:

"Have you read that article in the *Figaro?* It is there on the table. Read it, and then tell me what you think of it."

Daguenet's sneering laugh returned to her memory, and athwart her mind flashed a doubt as to whether she had understood it. If that wretch of a Fauchéry had ventured to trifle with her, or said anything which could be regarded as offensive, she would be even with him yet!

"They say he means me," she added, with affected indifference. "Read it, and tell me what you think."

She turned back to the mirror, and resumed her contemplation of herself. Muffat went to the table, found the *Figaro*, and, returning to his chair, began to read it slowly and attentively.

This article of Fauchéry's was called "The Golden Fly," and purported to be the history of a *fille* born of four or five generations of drunken ancestors. The blood, vitiated by a long inheritance of poverty and intemperance, in her cropped out into a certain hysterical disorder.

almost like insanity. She had grown up in the streets of Paris, tall, beautiful and fascinating, with the rank vitality of a plant flourishing on a common. She, in her womanhood, avenged the wrongs and the deprivations suffered by the poor and the abject, of which she was the natural outgrowth.

Through her, the rottenness that seethed among the lower classes fermented and rose to taint the aristocracy. She became a force of nature, an element of destruction, without any volition on her part, and by reason of her sex corrupting and disorganizing Paris, drawing its very life-blood.

It was at the end of this article that the comparison of the Fly was found—a golden fly—a fly the color of the sun—born among refuse—carrying about the poison from the carrion on the roadside, and which, whirring and dancing, sparkling like a jewel in the air, entering the very windows of palaces and, with no respect for rank, poisoned men only by lighting on them.

Muffat looked up from his paper, and gazed fixedly at the fire.

"Well?" said Nana, interrogatively.

But he did not answer; he began to read the article again from the beginning. A sensation of cold—an icy chill—ran down his spine from the base of the brain. This article was written with malignity, and with amazing fluency—with phrases that were absolutely eloquent. It seemed, however, to be but half serious, and the work rather of a "*blagueur*," than of a moralist.

Muffat, however, was greatly struck by it. These words had aroused within him all that had been lying dormant in the last few months.

He turned and looked at Nana, but she was so absorbed in self-admiration that she did not see him. She bent her round throat, and looked at the brown mole on her left cheek. She touched it lightly with the tip of her finger; she seemed to be both curious and amused. She extended her arms with a slow, graceful movement, and then half turned to see her back in the mirror, and ended by swaying to and fro, to the right and the left, with her form slightly bent, like an Almée.

Muffat watched her. She frightened him. The journal fell from his hands. In this brief moment of clearer insight he despised himself—he saw it all—he understood it all! In three months she had revolutionized his life, and he knew that he could no longer be happy in his home. Within him all was despair. He had a momentary but clear perception of the truth—he saw the disorganization produced by this wretch—himself wrecked, his family destroyed, society shattered and giving way on every side.

He could not turn his eyes from her, and felt an ever-growing disgust at her egotism. Nana had thrown back her head, resting it upon both hands which she had clasped together at the nape of her neck. Her eyes were half closed; her lips parted, and her whole face beaming with a radiant smile. Her yellow hair rippled over her shoulders like the tawny skin of a lion, and Muffat followed the undulating lines of this supple form from whose marble-like neck the light from the candles was reflected as from satin.

He recalled his old horror of woman—the Monster of Holy Writ. Nana was this Monster. He closed his eyes: he saw her still. All the animal in her face and form exaggerated in the darkness.

Nana unclasped her hands, put up one shoulder, and laid her cheek upon it in a caressing way, and smiled at another Nana in the mirror before her.

Then Muffat uttered a long, low sigh. He leaped to his feet, and snatched Nana violently in his arms.

"Leave me!" she cried; "you hurt me!"

He realized his brutality and released her, while she angrily reproached him for his roughness.

Presently she grew calmer, and, hoping that he would soon depart, she threw on a long, white peignoir trimmed with lace, and dropped on the tiger skin in front of the fire. This was her favorite seat. She began to question him about that article of Fauchéry's. Muffat answered cautiously and vaguely, fearing to offend her. Then she fell into a long silence, wondering how she could best contrive to send the Comte away.

She wished to do it nicely and kindly, because she was,

after all, a good-natured sort of person, and did not like to give pain to any one. She was quite touched moreover, by the thought that his wife was deceiving him.

"Then," she exclaimed, "it is to-morrow morning that you expect your wife?"

Muffat had thrown himself back in the arm-chair. He was weary in soul and in body, and simply nodded an affirmative without taking the trouble to speak. Nana looked at him. She was crouched on the rug amid all the light foam of her laces, and held one of her tresses in her two hands.

"How long have you been married?" she asked.

"Nineteen years," was the reply.

"Nineteen years!" she repeated. "And your wife, is she nice? Do you live happily together?"

He did not reply for a moment, and then in a constrained tone said:

"You know I have begged you not to talk of that."

"And why not?" she asked, angrily. "I don't think that my speaking of your wife will do her the least harm. My dear fellow, all women have their price, and—"

She checked herself, afraid of having said too much. She at once assumed an air of superiority, feeling that she was very good not to say more.

This poor man must not be too suddenly enlightened. A bright idea came to her at this moment, and she smiled as she said:

"Did I ever tell you the story that Fauchéry told me about you? He is a real snake in the grass."

And laughing again she dragged herself toward him, and laid her head on his knee.

"He told me that when you married your wife you had never even kissed a woman. Now that was a silly lie, was it not? Tell me, it was not true, was it?"

She urged him to reply, and putting her hands around his knee shook him slightly as she repeated her question.

"It certainly was true," he answered, gravely.

She sank on the floor in a paroxysm of laughter.

"My dear!" she exclaimed, in a choked voice; "is there another man in the world like you? And was there any one ever so silly before? I wish I had known you in

those days. Tell me something about them, won't you! Oh! do tell me!"

She overwhelmed him with questions, and exacted the smallest details. And she laughed so heartily that she could hardly speak. The Comte was led on and on, until at last she even induced him to speak of the Comtesse. He was ashamed, however, and chose his words with care.

"But is she such an iceberg, after all?" said Nana.

"You surely are not jealous?" answered Muffat, in a cowardly sort of way.

But Nana laughed no more. She had returned to the fire—sitting with her back to it, her hands clasped around her knees, and her chin resting upon them.

She said at last in a serious tone:

"Look here, my dear—you were very foolish to be so timid with your wife when you were first married."

"And why?" he asked, in some astonishment.

"Because," she answered slowly, with a magisterial shake of the head, but would not condescend to explain herself more fully. She continued to ramble on in a vague sort of way.

"You see I know all about it. Women don't like diffident men. They don't say so, you know, out of modesty, but they think enough, you may be sure; and sooner or later, when one least expects it, they take their revenge. That is the way, my dear."

He did not understand, and she became a trifle more lucid, and quite maternal—seeming anxious to give him good advice, out of kindness of heart, as from one comrade to another. Ever since she had learned that the Comtesse deceived him, the secret weighed heavily upon her, and it was with the greatest difficulty that she refrained from disclosing it.

"I know," she said, "that it is none of my business. I always say that everybody has a right to be happy in his own way. But let us talk sensibly together, and you will answer all my questions now, won't you?"

Here she stopped to change her position, for she was fairly roasting.

"It is frightfully hot here. My back is cooked, and now

I am going to turn around. This is a capital cure for neuralgia and all sorts of pains and aches."

She wheeled about, and settled herself in a luxurious position, and then, looking over one shoulder, said:

"You don't have much to do with your wife nowadays, I suppose?"

He, fearing a scene, hastened to assure her that he rarely saw the Comtesse alone.

"But you still think her an iceberg?"

He answered with an affirmative nod.

"And that is why you love me, I suppose? Tell me—I shall not be angry."

He nodded again.

"Precisely," she replied; "that is just what I thought. Ah! well. You know my Aunt Lerat, don't you? When you next see her ask her to tell you the story of the fruiterer, who is below her in the same house. But heavens; how hot this fire is! Wait until I can turn my left side; that should be cooked, too!"

And she laughed, saying that she reminded herself of a goose, plump and fair, cooking on a spit. As she laughed a noise of voices and doors opening and shutting, came to them from the kitchen. Muffat interrogated her with a look of surprise. She had become very grave, and had rather an anxious look. It was certainly that abominable cat—Zoé's pampered animal. But as Nana gave this explanation she looked at the clock. Half-past twelve. She must postpone her conversation with Muffat, and refrain a little longer from pulling the bandage from his eyes. He must be gotten rid of now as soon as possible.

"What were you saying?" asked Muffat, charmed to see her in so amiable a mood.

But, in her haste to dismiss him, her good humor vanished, and she became almost brutal, and careless of her words.

"Ah! yes, to be sure, I was telling you about the fruiterer and his wife. She turned a cold shoulder on him, and he on her; he thought her an iceberg, and so he found his amusements elsewhere, while she, in her turn, was not very cold to the young men of her acquaintance. Things

always go that way, you know; or if you don't know it, you ought, for I do."

Muffat turned very pale and tried to check her, but she was launched.

"No," she cried; "it is all the fault of you men. If you were not such muffs you would be as nice with your wives as with us, and if your wives were not geese they would take as much trouble to keep you as we do to have you. Now you can put all this in your pipe and smoke it."

"You had better not talk in this way of honest women. You know nothing about them," he said, harshly.

Nana lifted herself hastily upon her knees.

"I know nothing about them!" she exclaimed. "I know this, at all events, that your honest women are none too proper. You make me laugh with all this talk about your honest women! Don't push me too far, or I may say something that I may be sorry for!"

Muffat replied with some low muttered words.

In her turn Nana turned very pale. She looked at him fixedly for a few minutes without a word. Then, in a clear, cold voice, she said:

"What would you do if your wife should deceive you?"

He made a threatening gesture.

"Or I—suppose I should deceive you."

"Oh! you," he murmured, with an insolent shrug of his shoulders.

Nana most assuredly was not spiteful or vindictive, and had really struggled with herself for some time, resisting the desire to taunt him with his disgrace. But now he exasperated her, and she meant to make quick work of it.

"You have wearied me to death," she exclaimed, "for the past two hours. Go look after your wife who is with Fauchéry. You will find them both in La Rue Taitbout, at the corner of La Rue de Provence. I make you a present of this address," she added, triumphantly.

Then, seeing that Muffat reeled like an ox that had been struck on the head by the butcher, she said:

"Do honest women interfere with us and take our friends? You make me sick with all this talk about honest women."

But she could say no more. With terrible energy he

flung her upon the floor, and raised his foot almost as if he intended to compel her to silence by crushing her head.

She suffered an agony of fear for a moment. He turned away, strode up and down the room with his face drawn and convulsed, gasping for breath.

His silent struggle—the mortal combat he was waging with himself—touched her profoundly, and she determined to console him, and, as she curled herself up again in front of the fire, she said:

"I am sure, dear, I thought you knew it, or I should never have said a word about it. After all, perhaps it is not true. I am sure I know nothing for certain. I only know what everybody is saying, but that proves nothing. I can't see, however, what the use is of making such a fuss! If I were a man I would have nothing to do with women. Women from the highest to the lowest are about alike. There is not a sou to choose between them!"

She generalized in this fashion, by way of making the blow less cruel; he was not listening, but was hastily buttoning up his coat with trembling fingers. He took two or three strides up and down the room, then finding himself near the door he opened it and departed.

Nana was simply furious.

"Good riddance!" she called, and then added aloud, alone as she was: "He is certainly polite to go off like that when one is talking to him! And I who was beating round Robin Hood's barn merely to save his feelings, to have him whisk off in this way. He is a fool, too!"

As she spoke she caressed her arms with her dimpled hands, rubbing them up and down with apparent zest. Then, as if she had come to some decision, she exclaimed:

"Well! who cares? It is not my fault if his wife deceives him." And, having toasted herself to her heart's content, she rang the bell, and bade Zoé show in "the other" who was waiting. Muffat was striding rapidly through the streets in the midst of a heavy shower. He could hardly keep his footing, so slippery were the sidewalks. He looked up to the sky, over which black and

jagged clouds were scurrying; a fitful gleam of moonlight occasionally penetrated their masses.

At this hour there were but few persons in the Boulevard Haussmann, and he took the darkest side of the street, talking half aloud. This *fille* lied. She had invented this out of cruelty and stupidity. He ought to have crushed her head when he had it so nearly under his heel. He was filled with disgust at himself. He would never see her again.

As he uttered these words, he drew a long breath of relief and deliverance at being at last rid of this rude Monster—this stupid creature cooking like a goose before the fire—uttering these vile slurs on all that he had respected for forty years.

The moon emerged from the clouds. A white mist filled the deserted streets. He uttered one gasping sob—a sob of fear and absolute terror. A sense of despair and of an immense void had taken possession of him.

"My God!" he stammered; "it is all over! There is nothing left in this world."

He tried to regain his self-control, for an occasional person passed him. The words uttered by this *fille* haunted him, and seemed to have burned themselves into his brain. He tried to think and reason upon the facts which he repeated to himself over and over again. It was the next morning that the Comtesse was expected; of course there was no reason why she might not have come that night, and gone to meet this man. He remembered now certain occurrences during their visit at Fondettes.

One evening he had found Sabine under the trees in such a state of agitation, that she could not speak in reply to his questions.

This man was there then. Why was it so utterly impossible that she should be in his rooms at this precise moment? The more he thought of it the more possible it seemed to him, and he finally ended by thinking it probable, and even certain, that while he was in the room of this *fille* his wife was with her friend: nothing was more simple, nor more logical.

As he reasoned thus he endeavored to keep cool. He saw Nana and Sabine together, and shuddered at the vision

A fiacre nearly ran over him. Some women coming out from a café elbowed him with impudent laughs and jeers. Tears and convulsive sobs again shook him from head to foot notwithstanding all his efforts, and he hastily turned into La Rue Rossini, where in the darkness he wept like a child.

"It is all over!" he said, in a dull, hopeless voice. "It is all over. There is nothing left in this world!"

He was leaning against a door all shaken by the violence of his sobs. A footstep startled him. He felt a sense of shame and fear, which made him anxious to flee from the sight of man, with the furtive, stealthy step of a thief in the night.

When he met any one face to face, or some belated passer-by hurried on, he fancied that his story could be read in the mere movement of his shoulders. He had followed La Rue de la Grange-Batillière as far as La Rue du Faubourg-Montmartre. The sudden blaze of the street lamps took him by surprise, and he turned back. For a whole hour he wandered thus up and down the Quartier, choosing the darkest streets.

Apparently, he had an unwitting aim, for his feet took their way through complicated alleys and many turns, until all at once he raised his eyes and realized that he was at the corners of La Rue Taitbout and La Rue de Provence. He had spent an hour in reaching this point, which, but for the bewilderment of his pained and aching brain, he might have attained in a very few minutes. One morning in the previous month he remembered having gone up to Fauchéry's rooms to thank him for an article on the last ball at the Tuileries, where the journalist had mentioned him flatteringly. The apartment was the entre-sol—its small windows half concealed by the enormous sign over the shop-door below. The last window at the left had a bright line of light directly down the middle between the imperfectly closed curtains. He stood with his eyes fixed on this luminous ray in momentary but vague expectation of something.

The moon had disappeared again in a bank of inky clouds. A fine, icy rain was falling—the clock struck two. Muffat did not move. The window at which he was

looking was, as he remembered, that of the chamber hung in red with a Louis XIII. bed at the further end. The lamp must be on the chimney. Not a shadow had passed before the window. As he stood there he formed a plan in his own mind. He would ring and go in without answering the concierge, and, forcing open the door with a blow from his shoulders, would be in the presence of the guilty pair. He remembered that he had no arms, but he looked at his hands and thought he could strangle them.

He went over and over his plan and perfected it, waiting only for some indication to render him absolutely certain. If a woman's shadow should flit by the window, he would ring, but the thought that he might be mistaken bound him hand and foot. Doubts now assailed him. It was impossible that his wife should be with this man: It was too monstrous for belief. He lingered therefore in a painful state of indecision, and by degrees almost fell into a torpor.

A sharp shower was falling, and two policemen coming toward him made it necessary for him to leave the doorway in which he had taken shelter. But when these men had gone on and were lost to sight in La Rue de Provence, he went back to the same spot, wet through and shivering.

The luminous streak was still there, steady and calm. He was about to depart when a shadow flitted past, but so rapidly that he thought himself mistaken. He stood as if glued to the ground with an intolerable sense of burning at the pit of his stomach, waiting to understand, if possible, what was going on. Other shadows came and went. There seemed a wild confusion within the room. He saw a large hand carrying a water-pitcher, a woman's head and knotted hair, but he could see nothing clearly. The head looked too large for Sabine's, but he could not understand or realize anything. He felt faint and ill. He shrank into a doorway, shivering like some poor, poverty-stricken creature. But he could not turn his eyes from this window, and his anger as a husband changed into that of a moralist. He saw himself as a Deputy haranguing the Assembly, thundering against the vices of the age, and he recapitulated Fauchéry's article on the poisonous

fly, declaring that the manners and customs of the day were infamous. This did him good. Meanwhile the shadows had all disappeared, but he determined to wait and watch yet a little longer. The clock struck three, and then four. He could not depart. When the rain came down, he retreated further into the doorway. Not a human being went past. Occasionally he would close his eyes, blinded by this ray of light on which they had been riveted with imbecile determination.

Twice again did these same shadows appear and disappear—the hand with the huge ewer—and twice was calmness re-established there, and again the light burned calm and serene. The shadows seemed to indicate that Sabine could not be there, and suddenly a new idea came to soothe him. He had after all only to wait for Sabine to come out. No disguise could prevent him from knowing her, and then there would be absolute certainty and no scandal. He would wait. Of all the contradictory feelings that had assailed him only one now remained. All else were swallowed in the dull desire to know the truth.

But ennui assailed him, and as a distraction he began to make an estimate of the time he should be yet compelled to wait. Sabine must be at the station by nine o'clock. He must wait four hours and a half. He was not impatient—in fact, he did not care if he ever moved again, and rather wished that the period of waiting should be eternal.

Suddenly the light was extinguished. This simple incident was to him so utterly unexpected, that it disturbed him, and upset all his calculations. If the lamp was extinguished, it was because sleep was anticipated. But he was exasperated, for this black window afforded him no opportunity of investigation, and did not interest him. He watched another half hour, and then, feeling very weary, left his friendly doorway, and walked up and down the street until after five, looking up at the house occasionally. The window was one blank surface, and occasionally he asked himself if he had not been dreaming when he fancied that he had seen any shadows on those window-panes.

He was deadly tired, and at times almost forgot for what

he was waiting at this hour in the morning in the open street under this drizzling rain, and awoke to the reality with the start of a man who no longer knows where he is. Nothing after all was worth the trouble he was taking. If these people were asleep, why should he disturb them? What was the use of interfering? And then all at once even his curiosity deserted him. He felt only a strong desire to have it all over, and to find some relief somewhere and somehow.

It was all over. There was nothing left in the world. He would go away by the Boulevard and not come back. It was a dismal enough walk that he was taking. He walked very slowly and close to the houses. His heels resounded as they struck the sidewalks. He saw his shadow grow and decrease at each street lamp. He noticed this mechanically. He never knew just where he went; afterward it seemed to him that he had been at a circus going round and round.

He had but one distinct recollection. Without being able to say why, he remembered that he had stood for some time with his face pressed against the bars of the grated door to the Passage des Panoramas, clutching at the bars with both hands.

He did not shake them; he was merely trying to look in, his heart swelling with emotion. But he could see nothing. The Passage was dark with a tangible darkness, and the wind, which came down through La Rue Saint Marc, blew in his face with the dampness of a cellar.

Suddenly he came to his senses, and, emerging from a dream, he asked himself why he was there—for whom or for what he was looking—at this hour, with his face pressed so firmly against these iron bars that their impress was left upon it.

Then he turned away, and resumed his despairing walk with his heart filled to overflowing with intense sadness and a new sense of betrayal.

Day broke at last—the dull, dreary day that follows the long winter nights so melancholy on the muddy pavement of Paris. Muffat found himself in one of those large streets in process of construction.

Drenched by the showers, ploughed by the wagons, the

clayey soil was transformed into a muddy lake, and without paying heed to where he was going, Comte Muffat continued to walk, slipping and staggering almost as if he were tipsy. The awakening of the working life of Paris, the bands of street-sweepers and mechanics, occasioned him a new pang, for as the day grew lighter he was met by these people with frank looks of surprise, and he turned out of their way, and took refuge among the various scaffoldings.

He had but one idea now, and that was of his own unhappiness. All this frightful crisis terminated in a paroxysm of self-pity. He stumbled, and the tears came to his eyes —not angry tears against Fate, for he felt ill and feeble. He was cold, wet and faint; but the mere thought of going to that dark Hôtel in La Rue Merosmesnil chilled him. He would have liked to be warm once more—to be caressed and comforted.

Mechanically he turned to find Nana. The door was not yet open, and he was compelled to wait until the concierge appeared. As he went slowly up the stairs, he smiled faintly, soothed by the languid warmth of this place where he could sleep and rest.

When Zoé opened at his knock, she shrugged her shoulders with stupefaction and temper. Madame was ill—a frightful migraine had kept her awake all night, but she would see—yes, certainly she would see—whether Madame were awake now. And she stepped into the next room, while the Comte dropped into a chair in the salon.

But all at once Nana came in like a whirlwind. She had jumped from the bed, and had hastily thrown on a skirt; her feet were bare, and her hair in wild disorder.

"Is that you back again?" she cried, angrily. She ran in her rage and threw open the door of the salon to dismiss him; but seeing him so crushed and despairing, she felt a little pity, and said more gently:

"What a state you are in, to be sure! You have been watching them, have you not?"

He did not answer, but looked like some weary animal crouched in the fauteuil, and at last she understood that proofs were lacking, and in order to put him at his ease, she said:

"You see, then, that I was mistaken. I knew nothing about it. Your wife is a good woman for aught I know to the contrary. Now, then, my dear, go back to your house and go to bed. You need it."

He did not move.

"You really must go; I cannot keep you here. You surely had no intention of remaining at this hour."

"Yes," he answered, with some difficulty, "I am going to stay."

She repressed an angry gesture. Her patience was nearly gone. Had he become an idiot?

"Please go at once," she said.

"No."

Then she burst out in a rage.

"This is utterly disgusting," she cried. "Don't you understand—won't you comprehend—that I have had enough of you? Go and find the wife who has deceived you! Yes, she has done just this thing, I tell you so. Now will you let me alone?"

Muffat's eyes filled with tears. He clasped his hands.

"Let me stay here," he repeated.

Then Nana all at once burst into nervous sobs. Why was she exposed to this sort of thing? What was it to her, how all these women treated their husbands? She had done her best to break the blow to this man, and what could she do more? Was she to pay for all the broken dishes? No, indeed. She was good-natured—too good-natured, but not quite equal to that.

"I have had enough of you," she said, furiously, as she brought her fist down on a table. "I meant to be faithful to you, and to-morrow I could be rich, if I would say the word."

He lifted his head in surprise; he had never dreamed of this question of money. If she had indicated her wishes, he would at once have gratified them, he said. "His entire fortune was at her disposal."

"No, it is too late," she answered, passionately. "I like men who give without being asked. If you were to offer me a million, and implore me to take it, I would not accept it. It is all over with. Go away, and at once,

or I can't answer for myself. I shall certainly do something terrible."

She advanced toward him with a threatening gesture, with the nervous exasperation of a kindly-natured *fille* pushed to the extreme of desperation, convinced that she had right on her side, and that she was infinitely superior to the honest people about her, when all at once the door opened and Steiner appeared. This was the last feather. She uttered a terrible exclamation, and "here comes the other!"

Steiner, confounded by the tone of her voice, stood still. The unexpected presence of Muffat at this hour annoyed him; but he was afraid of the explanation which had been impending for three months. He half closed his eyes, and seemed embarrassed, avoiding the Comte's eyes. He panted with the short breath and red face of a man who had been running all over Paris in search of good news, and who suddenly discovers that it is some frightful catastrophe which he so blithely announces.

"What do *you* want now?" said Nana, rudely.

"I—I—" stammered Steiner—"I only came to give you something you wanted."

He hesitated. The evening before she had signified to him that if he did not bring her a thousand francs to pay a bill she would never receive him again. For two days he sought on every side to raise this money, and had succeeded only that morning.

"Here are the thousand francs," he said, at last, drawing an envelope from his pocket.

Nana had forgotten.

"The thousand francs!" she cried. "Did I ask alms at your hands? Look, this is what I will do with your thousand francs!"

And snatching the envelope she threw it full in his face.

With Jewish prudence he stooped and picked it up, and then stood looking at her in open-mouthed astonishment.

Muffat and he exchanged a look of despair, while she, with her hands on her hips, talked more loudly and angrily than before.

"Well!" she said, "have you finished with your insults? I am glad that you came now, while this man was here—for the clearing out will be all the more complete. Now be off with you both! Clear out! I say."

Then, as they did not move, standing as if paralyzed, she went on more furiously than before.

"You think me a fool, I suppose? Well! I dare say I am, but you are both so stupid, and I am tired of being *chic*. If I starve in my old age it is my own lookout, I suppose!"

They endeavored to calm her. They implored her to listen, but she refused.

"One, two—when I say three, you must go. You won't? Very well. Look in there: I have company, do you see?"

And with a sudden movement she opened the door of her bedroom wide, where the two men saw Fontan—who, unexpected as was this disclosure, was not in the least disturbed, and amused himself by making the most hideous faces.

Fontan was Nana's last caprice. She had been for a week, each evening, to the Variétés in her coupé, to bring him home with her.

"Look!" she said, pointing to him with a tragic gesture.

Muffat, who had accepted everything, rebelled at this last insult, and uttered an abusive epithet.

Nana turned, and hurled the word back upon him.

"And your wife is the same!" she added, and going into her chamber she shut the door violently, and drew the bolts.

The two men, left alone in the salon, looked at each other in silent dismay. Zoé came in, but she was not rude to them in any way; she on the contrary talked to them most reasonably. She admitted that this caprice of Madame's was most foolish and unwarrantable. She had no business to take up with this strolling player, but they must wait until her passion for him had worn away.

The two men departed without one word. On the sidewalk, moved by a fellow-feeling, they exchanged a silent grasp of the hand, and turning their backs upon each other, they separated, and walked away each in a listless, dispirited fashion.

When Muffat at last reached his hotel in La Rue Meromesnil his wife was just coming in. They met on the wide stair-case, whose chill dreariness sent a chill to the marrow of their bones. They looked up and saw each other. The Comte still wore his muddy garments, and his pallor was that of a man steeped in vice.

The Comtesse was white and worn from her night spent on the railway, and seemed to be only half awake—her veil fell over her face, and partially concealed her weary eyes.

CHAPTER XII.

A HOUSE-WARMING.

IT was in La Rue Véron at Montmartre, in a little lodging on the fourth floor, that Nana, with Fontan and a few friends, celebrated Twelfth Night. This was their house-warming, for they had not been installed more than three days.

It was done suddenly, on the spur of the moment, without any previous idea of the plan, in the first enthusiasm of their honeymoon. The day after her outburst and the rating she had given to her Count and her Banker, when she had dismissed them, and closed her door upon them—Nana felt as if the whole world were crumbling to pieces about her. She lived only on credit, which the names of these gentlemen allowed her to obtain. She grasped the situation at a glance—all her creditors would pounce down upon her—interfere with all her little affairs—and very possibly sell her out, if she were not very wise. There would be endless quarrels and disputes over her poor furniture, and she preferred to relinquish everything. Besides, these apartments on the Boulevard Haussmann did not please her; they were too large and too dull. In her sudden passion for Fontan she dreamed of a pretty, sunny little room—went back, in fact, to her old dreams in the days when she was a florist, and had never thought of a mahogany bedstead, hung with blue rep, nor of a huge *armoire à glace*. In two days she sold all she could carry out—all her bric-à-brac and her jewels—and disappeared from view with about ten thousand francs, and without a word to the concierge. She completely vanished, leaving not a trace behind her. Fontan was very good-natured. He did not consent, but submitted. He even behaved like a good comrade. He had about seven thousand francs. These he added to her ten thousand, although he was accused of being very avaricious. These funds seemed to assure them a solid foundation, and they started forth, took the rooms in

La Rue Véron, and furnished them from their common funds with all the frankness of two old friends. The first days were truly romantic.

On Twelfth Night Madame Lerat was the first to arrive, with little Louis. She seemed somewhat anxious, and as Fontan was not there, she permitted herself to express her fears. She had seen her niece throw away her fortune with many misgivings. "But, aunt, I love him so dearly!" cried Nana, putting her hands with a pretty gesture upon her breast.

These words affected Madame Lerat in a most extraordinary way. Her eyes filled with tears. "Yes, it is true," she said earnestly—"love counts above all else."

And she began to admire the prettiness of the apartment. Nana took her into the bedroom, the dining-room, and even into the kitchen, which certainly was not very large, but it had been painted and re-papered, and it was full of sunshine.

"It is as fresh as a rose!" said Madame Lerat, in a sentimental tone—"a real turtle-doves' nest."

Then she took Nana aside, while Louis remained in the kitchen with the woman of the house to see her roast a fowl. Madame Lerat was thoughtful and anxious because Zoé had just left her; this woman had nobly and faithfully stood in the breach out of pure devotion to Madame. She was sure, she said, that later Madame would pay her. She was not in the smallest degree anxious. In all the confusion in La Rue Haussmann, it was she who faced the creditors, and managed a dignified retreat, rescuing all stray trifles, replying to every question with the simple statement that Madame was about to travel, and gave no address whatever. She even, out of fear of being followed, refrained from paying Madame a visit; but that morning she had ran in to see Madame Lerat, because she had news to tell her.

The evening before, all the creditors had assembled—the upholsterer, the charcoal merchant, and the various shop-people—offering an extension of credit, proposing even to advance money to Madame, if she would return to her apartment, and conduct herself in an intelligent fashion.

The aunt repeated Zoé's words—"Of course, there was some gentleman behind all these offers."

"Never!" cried Nana, indignantly—"Upon my word, these people are nice creatures! Do they think that I am ready to sell myself merely to pay these bills? I tell you, I would rather die of hunger than deceive Fontan!"

"That is precisely what I told them," said Madame Lerat. "I bade Zoé say that you had too much heart to accept their proposition."

Nana, nevertheless, was much vexed to learn that La Mignotte was sold, and that it was Labordette who had purchased it, at a preposterously low price, for Caroline Héquet. This news put her entirely out of temper with the old clique, who were regular cheats, she declared, in spite of all their *chic*.

"They may boast and swagger," she concluded. "Money will not give them true happiness. I really don't care anything about all these people nowadays. Their very existence is a matter of indifference to me. I am so entirely happy."

Just then Madame Maloir entered, wearing one of those extraordinary hats of which she alone knew the form. It was a great pleasure to see her again. Madame Maloir explained that she had been intimidated by all Nana's past grandeur; but now, that things were changed, she meant to come in occasionally, for her game of Besique.

They all made a second visit to the kitchen, where, in the presence of the woman of the house, who was basting the fowl, Nana spoke of economy—said that a servant would cost too much, and that she herself intended to do all the work. Louis was watching the chicken with a rapt expression.

Voices were heard. It was Fontan, accompanied by Bosc and Prullière. They went to the table and ate their soup, when Nana insisted on showing the apartment once more.

"Ah! my children; you are indeed well off here!" said Bosc, over and over again, merely to gratify the comrades who had invited him to dinner; for, in fact, the question of this "turtle-doves' nest" did not interest him in the least.

"Yes, it is very nice," murmured Prullière, in a constrained sort of way; "a little contracted, possibly, but very nice."

In the bedroom, Bosc again burst into a psalm of praise. He generally treated women as if they were fools, and the idea that a man would willingly embarrass himself with one of them filled him with violent indignation,—the indignation of a drunken man against all the rest of the world.

"Ah! the cunning creatures!" he said, with a wink, "they have settled themselves comfortably, and they are right. It is all delightful and we shall come and see you very often!"

Little Louis pranced into the room, at this moment, on a broom-stick, and Prullière said, with a wicked laugh:

"Hallo! is that baby yours?"

This struck the party as an excellent joke. Madame Lerat and Madame Maloir nearly died of laughter. Nana, instead of being angry, replied, in a tender tone, "No—unfortunately he has not yet come to live with us; but he will come soon, we hope."

Fontan, who was enacting the part of father of a family, took the boy in his arms, and had a frolic with him.

"All the same; he loves his father!" he exclaimed. "Call me papa, you little toad!"

"Papa! papa!" stammered the child.

Then every one kissed him. Bosc, who was bored to death, proposed to go back to the table, where Nana asked permission to place a chair for little Louis at her side. The dinner was very gay. Bosc, nevertheless, suffered from the vicinity of the child, against whom he was obliged constantly to defend his plate. Madame Lerat annoyed him also. She was pathetic at times, and insisted on addressing him in a low voice, making mysterious allusions to his beautiful white beard in *The Blonde Venus*. She told him tales, also, of men who still admired her, and twice he was obliged to draw his hand away because she touched it, with her eyes fixed on his. Prullière conducted himself very badly toward Madame Maloir, whom he would not serve with anything. He occupied himself only with Nana. He unquestionably suffered keenly at

seeing her with Fontan, all the more because the turtle-doves ended by becoming great bores, so incessant were their kisses and terms of endearment. Contrary to all rules they had seated themselves next each other.

"The deuce take it all!" cried Bosc, with his mouth full; "why don't you eat? You have plenty of time for all that nonsense."

But Nana could not contain herself; she was carried away by love, and flushed with the tenderness of a young girl. With her eyes riveted on Fontan, she called him by a succession of pet names, and when he handed her the water or the salt she would kiss his eyes, his nose, his ear, or his lips, it did not matter to her which feature, and if she was scolded she persisted in gaining stealthy possession of his hand, which she kissed and caressed with the humility of a beaten cat. It seemed absolutely essential that she should touch Fontan, who put on great airs, and allowed himself to be adored. His large nostrils dilated with profound joy. His goat-like face, his monster-like ugliness, seemed to expand under the adoration of this handsome woman. Occasionally he would give her a kiss, in a condescending sort of way.

"Do be done!" cried Prullière. "Do be done, I say!" and he insisted on changing seats with Fontan, and took the place by Nana's side; whereupon ensued many exclamations, much applause, and some strong words—Fontan mimicking despair, after the style of Vulcan weeping for Venus.

Presently Prullière was guilty of some unexpected gallantry; but Nana quickly brought him to order with a gentle kick. No, indeed! she would not have him for a friend; a month ago she had taken a fancy to him because of his handsome head; but now she detested him. If he touched her hand again, on pretext of picking up her napkin, she would certainly throw her wine-glass in his face.

The evening went off well. They naturally talked much of the Variétés. Would that miserable Bordenave never drop off? All his old maladies had reappeared, and he suffered so much that he was not worth picking up with a pair of tongs.

The evening before at rehearsal he had scolded Simonne for a full hour at the top of his voice. He was a Manager for whom not one tear would be shed!

Nana declared that should he ever need her and apply to her she would send him flying—for she never intended playing again. She liked her home better than the theatre. Fontan, who was not in the new piece and had not been in the one just taken off the boards, affected to be disillusioned, and declared that it was delightful to be master of his own acts and time, to be free in fact, to be able to pass the evening before the fire, alone with Nana.

And the others exclaimed at this, but pretended to envy their happiness.

The Twelfth Night cake had been put on the table—the bean came to Madame Lerat, who dropped it in Bosc's wine glass. Then all cried at once, "The King drinks! The King drinks!"

Nana profited by this uproar to put her arm round Fontan's neck and whisper something in his ear. But Pruillière, with a forced laugh, called out that this was not the game. Little Louis slept on two chairs.

The company did not separate until nearly one o'clock, and there were loud cries of *au revoir* from the staircase as the guests departed.

"You have done well," muttered Bosc, with his mouth full; "and I shall come on Sunday to break bread with you again."

For three weeks the life of these two lovers was really idyllic in its simplicity. It seemed to Nana that she had gone back to her girlhood, when her first silk dress had given her such intense pleasure. One morning early, while she was playing at simplicity, she went out very early to buy some fish at the Rochefoucauld market, where she met her old coiffeur, Francis, face to face. He was as correctly dressed as usual, his linen was as fine, and she felt almost ashamed to be seen by him wearing a peignoir in the street, with her shoes down at heel, and her hair in disorder.

He, however, had the taste to be even more polite than usual. He did not allow himself to ask a question. He

affected to believe that Madame was travelling. "Ah!" he said, "Madame's determination to travel had caused much unhappiness. It was a loss to every one!"

Nana began a series of questions as soon as she had recovered from her first embarrassment. As the crowd knocked against her, she retreated to a doorway, where she stood with her little basket under her arm.

"What had been said in regard to her disappearance?" she asked—for her curiosity had caused her to forget her first embarrassment.

Francis answered that everywhere he went he heard her talked about.

"And Steiner?" she asked.

"Oh, Steiner was very low down, and if he did not soon succeed in making some fortunate hit, would go under."

"And Daguenet?"

"Oh, he was doing well enough."

Nana, more and more excited by all these souvenirs, opened her lips to ask more questions, but she hesitated before she uttered Muffat's name.

Francis, however, came out with it himself, and said, with a smile, that he was really sorry for the Count—he had suffered so much after Madame's departure. He was like a lost soul, wandering about wherever Madame had been seen. Monsieur Mignon chancing to see him, took him home with him.

This last piece of news elicited a laugh from Nana—but it was not a hearty one.

"So he is with Rose, is he?" she asked, angrily. "He could not fast, it seems, even a week after I got rid of him! And yet he swore to me over and over again that he would never look at any other woman after me!"

She grew more and more furious as she talked.

"I understand it all!" she cried. "Rose is revenging herself for my carrying off from her that beast of a Steiner—a nice thing for her to do, I must say, to take up with a man that I have kicked out of doors!"

"But Monsieur Mignon does not tell the story in that way," answered the hair-dresser; "he pretends that it was the Count who dismissed you. Yes, and in a most insult-

ing way—kicked you out, in fact—absolutely, and not as a mere figure of speech."

Nana turned perfectly white.

"Kicked me! Does Mignon say that the Count kicked me? That is a little too much! No, my good man, it was I who dismissed this wretch—for wretch he is, you know. His beautiful Countess has deceived him over and over again, and this last time with that fool, Fauchéry. And Mignon, who goes all over Paris to find admirers for his wife—whom nobody wants because she is only a sack of bones—dares to talk this way of me! What a vile set of people! What a vile world!"

Her wrath choked her; she caught her breath.

"And they talk that way, do they? Ah, well, Francis! I will go and face them and will tell them out in plain words, that they are a set of liars. Kick me, indeed! I should like to see the man that would dare to touch me in that way; I would kill him as quick as a wink!"

She grew calmer by degrees. After all, they might say what they pleased; she did not care for them any more than for the mud on her shoes. It was a dirty piece of business which she did not care to undertake, to occupy herself with these people; she knew what she was about.

And Francis, growing familiar under the influence of her dirty peignoir, ventured before he left her, to give her a little advice. She had been very wrong—had made a great mistake in throwing over all her prospects for a freak, a mere caprice. Such things never led to good; they always ended badly, sooner or later. She listened, with her head slightly bowed, while he continued to express his regret that a handsome creature like herself should flaunt Fortune in this foolish and reckless way.

"That is my own affair," she said at last; "but I thank you all the same."

She shook his hand, which was always more or less greasy in spite of his elaborate costume, and she went on to buy her fish. All day long her mind dwelt on the story of the kick she was reported to have received. She even spoke of it to Fontan, and assumed the air of a strong-minded woman who scorned such idle slanders; while

Fontan loftily declared that most men were muffs, and utterly despicable, to which statement Nana heartily agreed.

They went to the Bouffes that same night, to see a little woman, whom Fontan knew, make her first appearance in a rôle of ten lines. It was almost one o'clock in the morning when they reached Montmartre on foot. In la Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin they had bought some cake,—a *moka*—which they eat in discomfort because it was cold, and they did not want the trouble of lighting a fire. They sat up with their street-clothes on, that they might be somewhat warm, eating their supper and talking of the little woman they had seen, whom Nana declared to be ugly and without *chic*. Fontan, who was not in a good humor, handed the cake to her, which lay on the table beside the candle and the matches. Their discussion ended in a dispute.

"Her eyes are like gimlets!" cried Nana, "and her hair is the color of flax."

"Nonsense!" said Fontan. "Her hair is magnificent, and her eyes are full of fire. It is droll how you women always pick each other to pieces."

He spoke in a vexed tone.

"Come, now, don't say any more," he added, roughly; "I hate such talk. Let us go to sleep, or we shall quarrel," and he blew out the candle.

Nana, however, was not to be silenced after this summary fashion. She did not choose, she said, that any one should speak to her in this tone; she was in the habit of being treated with respect. As he did not answer, she was compelled to relapse into silence; but she could not sleep, and tossed about restlessly.

"Good heavens! are you never going to be still?" he exclaimed, with a start.

"It is not my fault," answered Nana, coldly; "there are crumbs in the bed"—as indeed there were. She declared that one single one was quite enough to prevent her from closing her eyes; besides it was generally the custom, before retiring, to shake the clothes well.

Fontan, in silent rage, lighted the candle. They both rose, and with bare feet took off the coverlid and brushed the crumbs off upon the floor with their hands. He, with

a shiver, was the first to go back to the bed, swearing at her because she told him to be sure there were no crumbs on his feet. As soon as she, too, had resumed her place, she began to fidget.

"I knew it!" she exclaimed; "I knew just how it would be. You brought them back on your feet. I can't stand them, I tell you!"

And she started up and tried to step over him, in order to leave the bed. Out of all patience, and anxious to sleep, Fontan hit her a cuff which was so forcible, that all at once Nana found herself flat on her back, with her head on her pillow; she was almost stunned.

"Oh!" she said, simply, with a long, quivering sigh, like that of a grieved child.

He threatened her with another cuff if she moved a finger again that night, and blowing out the candle once more he settled himself squarely on his back, and was soon snoring loudly.

She, with her face buried in her pillow, wept bitterly. It was a cowardly thing, she thought, for a man to take such advantage of his strength. She was, moreover, really frightened, so sombre had Fontan's droll face become; then anger against him disappeared, as if the blow she had received had calmed her. She respected him all the more for it, but retreated to the edge of the bed, in order that he might have all the more room.

She finally fell asleep, with one cheek red and hot, her eyes filled with tears, but wrapped in such delicious exhaustion, and in so tender and submissive a mood, that she no longer felt the crumbs.

In the morning when she awoke she took Fontan in her arms and kissed him tenderly. "He must never do that again," she said, "never again." She loved him so much, she declared that it was bliss to receive even his blows!

This was to her a totally new experience, and from this time forth Fontan hit her at any word from her lips which displeased him. She quietly accepted this as a matter of course. Sometimes she rebelled and threatened him, but he pushed her back against the wall and threatened to strangle her, which rendered her very sub-

missive. She would crouch on a chair, and sob for twenty minutes or so, and then forget it all and be as gay as ever, filling the room with song and laughter, and with the rustle of her petticoats as she bustled about. The worst of the whole was that Fontan now disappeared every day, and did not return until midnight. He went to the cafés frequented by his comrades. Nana bore all, trembling with fear lest if she addressed a single reproach to him he would never come back. She welcomed him, therefore, always with caresses and smiles.

On certain days when neither her boy nor Madame Maloir was with her, she was frightfully ennuyée and lonely. One Sunday therefore, when she went to market to bargain for some pigeons, she was enchanted to meet Satin, who was buying a bunch of radishes. Since the evening when the Prince had drank Fontan's champagne they had entirely lost sight of each other.

"What! You here? Living in this Quartier?" Satin exclaimed, on seeing her in her slippers in the streets at this early hour. "Ah! my poor girl—has it come to this?"

Nana silenced her with a frown, because other women were near her in their sacks and petticoats, with their hair tumbling about their ears, uncombed and unwashed.

In the morning all the *filles* of the Quartier came out to buy their provisions, dragging their slipshod shoes after them, out of humor and sleepy. They poured down from each narrow street into the market-place, some of them young, pale, and pretty; others old, haggard, and worn.

The men as they passed looked at them—but the women did not return their glances, but walked on with their heads held as high as if they had been honest mistresses of households, in whose eyes men, with the exception of husbands, fathers, and brothers, were not worthy of a glance.

Just as Satin paid for her radishes a young man, some belated employé, threw her a kiss and a "Good-morning, my love!"

Satin drew herself up with the air of an offended queen and said angrily, "What does that fool take me for?"

A second glance told her that she had seen him before. Three nights previously she had met him at midnight on the Boulevard, and had talked to him for a half an hour at the corner of La Rue Labrouyère. But that did not soften her heart now.

"What muffs they are to call out such things to one in full daylight!" she said to Nana. "When we are attending to our business they had best let us alone and show us some respect!"

Nana ended by buying her pigeons, although she was a little doubtful about their freshness. Then, as Satin wished to show her where she lived, near by in La Rue Rochefoucauld, she walked on with her.

When the two women were alone, Nana told Satin of her passion for Fontan. They walked more and more slowly and finally stood still before Satin's door. Satin with her radishes in her hand and her eyes wide open with astonishment at some of the details given her by Nana, who no longer adhered to truth in her account of what had taken place in her last interview with Comte Muffat. She declared that she had kicked the Count down-stairs.

"Nice people they all are!" said Satin, much excited; "I tell you these great people are not a whit better than we are. I always knew it. They don't understand us either, and they are so tiresome too! And to think that you kicked him down-stairs. What on earth did he say? How did he stand it? He is a coward it seems! I wish I had seen his face. My dear creature, you did well to establish yourself with Fontan. And after all, what does money matter? When we begin to starve it is time to think of that! Now you must come and see me as you promised. The door on the left. You must knock three times, because there is such a noise always in the next room."

After this whenever Nana was bored and alone, she went to see Satin. She was always certain of finding her, for the girl never went out until six o'clock. She occupied two rooms which an apothecary had furnished for her to save her from the police; but in less than thirteen months she had broken the furniture, worn out the seats of the chairs, spotted the curtains, and everything was so dirty

and disorderly that the place looked as if it were inhabited by an army of madcats.

Sometimes, disgusted herself at the uncleanliness, she determined to have a grand cleaning; but the arms of the chairs fell out, and the curtains came to rags in her hands, so excessive was the energy she employed. On such days the place was worse than ever, because so many things were piled up about the door that it was almost impossible to get in.

Finally, she ended by never attempting to clear up or clean. At night, the wardrobe with its long mirrors, the clock and the remnants of the curtains, imposed on the men, and the place in their eyes had quite a respectable appearance. For six months her landlord had threatened her almost daily with expulsion and seizure; if he did so, what did she care for her furniture? She was not going to take care of it for him. And when she was in an especially gay humor, she would give a kick or a knock to the wardrobe or the dressing-table.

Nana generally found her in bed. Even on the days when Satin went out to make her little purchases, she would return and fling herself across the bed, and utterly wearied out would fall asleep. She dragged herself about from chair to chair, all day long, and never revived until the gas was lighted.

Nana, however, was very comfortable in these strange quarters, seated in the middle of the unmade bed, surrounded by basins and pails of dirty water, and by skirts thrown on the sofa or chairs, stained with the mud brought in from the streets the night before. They chattered like magpies, exchanging endless confidences, while Satin, often lay in dreamy, idle contemplation of nothing in particular, smoking cigarettes.

Sometimes they drank absinthe on those days when they felt especially wretched—in order to forget, they said. Without going down herself, without even putting on a gown, Satin would sally forth into the corridor and call over the railing to the boy of the house—a lad of some ten years, and bid him bring up glass after glass.

All the conversation turned on the various iniquities of

men. Nana was inclined to be very wearisome with her constant talk about Fontan. She could not say ten words without bringing in something about him—something he had said or done.

But Satin, in the most amiable manner, listened to this eternal account of hours spent in watching at the window; of the quarrel over a ragoût that was burned; and of the reconciliation at night, after hours of sulky silence.

And simply because she could not keep the story to herself, Nana told of the blows she had received. Only the week before he had blacked her eye, and last night, because he could not find his slippers, he had thrown her over the table by a box on her ear. Satin was not in the least astonished; she placidly smoked her cigarette, interrupting herself only to say that if it were she, she would not put up with blows. She should draw the line there!

They ended their mutual narrations with laughing, and seemed to think the ill-treatment they received an excellent joke. It was the pleasure of talking about Fontan—of dwelling on the manner in which Fontan eat his breakfast and put on his boots—which brought Nana to Satin's side almost daily; all the more that Satin was especially sympathetic, and ready to tell her story in return. She told how a certain pastry-cook had felled her to the ground and left her for dead; but she loved him all the same.

There were some days when Nana cried her eyes out, and declared she could not stand it any longer. Satin went to her door with her occasionally, and waited outside in the street to see that he did not murder her, and the next day the two women would talk over the reconciliation, preferring, although they did not say so, the days when these tempests darkened the air, because they had then more interest and excitement.

They became inseparable, but Satin never went to Nana's, Fontan having declared that he would not have her in his house. They went out together, however, and it was in that way that Satin took her friend, one day, to see a woman, the very Madame Robert, who had at one time occupied much of Nana's thoughts by refusing to come to her supper.

Madame Robert lived in La Rue Mosmer—a new and

very quiet street in the Quartier de l'Europe, which has no shops, and whose fine houses, with small apartments, are occupied mostly by ladies. It was five o'clock; along the deserted sidewalks in the calm shelter of these high, aristocratic houses, stood coupés belonging to bankers and merchants, from which men quickly alighted, with a glance at the windows, where, half sheltered by the curtains, stood women in peignoirs, apparently expecting them.

Nana at first refused to enter, saying, with a constrained air, that she did not know the lady. But Satin insisted. Could not one always take a friend anywhere? She herself had merely come to make a visit of politeness, because Madame Robert, whom she had met the evening before in a restaurant, had been very cordial, and urged her to come and see her.

Nana finally yielded. On ringing, a sleepy little servant said that Madame had not yet come in, but she showed them, nevertheless, into the salon, where she left them.

"Zounds! This is *chic*, indeed!" said Satin, half aloud.

It was a severe, bourgeois-looking room, hung with dark draperies, and had the look of having been arranged for a Parisian shopkeeper, who had retired from business with a fortune.

Nana, quite impressed, made a little joke or two, but Satin got angry and said she would vouch for Madame Robert's virtue. She was never seen except with elderly, serious men, on whose arm she leaned. Just now an old dealer in chocolate was generally with her. When he called on her he was always announced, and addressed her as "my child."

"But look—there she is!" continued Satin, pointing to a large photograph of Madame Robert which, in a carved oak frame, stood in the centre of the mantel shelf.

Nana studied the portrait attentively. It represented a brunette with an oval face, a discreet smile, and all the air of a woman of the best society, the whole character of the countenance was that of extreme reserve.

"It is very odd," she murmured. "I have certainly seen that face somewhere. Where can it have been? No:

in a very proper place; of that I am sure—yes, very sure—it was not in a proper place—"

She turned to her friend.

"She made you promise to come and see her, did she? What did she want?"

"What did she want? Nothing, of course—only to talk a little and see me, I suppose; it was only out of politeness that she asked me to come."

Nana looked at Satin fixedly for a moment, and then made a little contemptuous sound with her tongue. After all, what was it to her? But, as the lady was not at home, it was not worth while to wait any longer for her, and they took their departure.

The next day, Fontan having told Nana that he should not return to dinner, she went out early to get Satin, and proposed a good dinner at a restaurant, the choice of which was a matter of serious discussion.

Satin proposed several *brasseries* one after the other, all of which Nana vetoed as low. They finally decided to go to Laure's, which was a table d'hôte—Rue des Martyrs—where dinner was served at three francs.

They got tired of lounging about the streets, and finally entered the restaurant twenty minutes too early—the three salons were as yet empty. They took their seats at a table in the same room where Laure Piedefer was enthroned on her chair behind the counter.

This Laure was a woman of fifty, very stout, and tightly laced. The women, as they came in, leaned over the glasses and kissed her familiarly, the monster returning the caresses with impartiality. The servant, who stood near her ready to wait on the ladies, was very different in appearance—tall, and thin, with discolored eyelids. She watched each new-comer with sombre fire in her glances. The rooms filled up rapidly. There came about a hundred women—regular customers—most of them about forty years of age, with vicious faces and haggard eyes. Among them, however, was an occasional girlish figure and youthful face, with an innocent sort of air under all their bold mannerism and gestures—debutantes in vice who were brought there by some of Laure's old customers, as an attraction to the elderly men, who

hovered about them and proffered them all sorts of dainties.

As to the men, they were fewer in number and older in years, meek and submissive among all these petticoats. There were only four young fellows, who had come there to have some fun.

"Is not this good?" asked Satin, with her mouth full.

Nana nodded, and felt quite pleased. The dinner was the solid dinner of a provincial hotel. Vol-au-vent à la financière—poule au riz—haricots au jus—créme a la vanille, glacé de caramel.

Nana and Satin took an especial fancy to the chicken cooked with rice, and ate until they could eat no more, wiping their lips slowly with an air of intense enjoyment.

Nana at first had been in fear of meeting old friends who might ask her stupid questions; but she was soon at her ease, as she saw not one face she had ever seen before.

Among the crowd, faded finery, old-fashioned gowns and lamentable-looking hats were displayed side by side in this fraternity of vice with the richest toilettes.

She felt a brief interest in a young man with short curly hair and an insolent face, who sat at a table where there were only women, who all hung on his least word and gesture. The young man laughed and threw himself back in his chair.

"He is a woman!" she cried aloud in her surprise, and with a disgusted face she turned away. She could not understand that sort of thing, she said, as she eat her cream with a philosophical air. She saw, too, that Satin, with her Madonna-like face, had created a great sensation at all the neighboring tables. Close to them was a stout, fair woman, who was especially amiable, so much so that Nana was about to interfere.

At this moment, however, her attention was attracted by a lady who had just entered. This lady was Madame Robert, who, with her pretty air, like a dainty brown mouse, gave a little familiar nod to the tall, thin servant, and then leaned over Laure's counter, and the two exchanged a long kiss. Nana thought this a very strange proceeding on the part of a person so fastidious and dis-

tinguée as Madame Robert claimed to be, all the more that the lady had, for the time, entirely laid aside her characteristic air of reserve.

She looked about the salon, talking in a low voice and questioning Laure, who had sank back in her seat in all the majestic indolence of an old idol of Vice—her face worn and glossy from the kisses of the faithful. She reigned over her stout clientèle, behind her full plates, with the calm satisfaction of a mistress of a Hotel who sees fortune at last recompense her for forty years of toil.

As soon as Madame Robert caught sight of Satin, she left Laure, and ran to greet her in the most amiable manner, saying how much she regretted not having been at home the previous evening; and as Satin, quite fascinated, wished to make room for her, she said she had already dined, and had only come in, to see what was going on.

As she spoke she stood behind her new friend, with her hands on her shoulders, smiling and looking.

"Tell me, when will you come again?" she said. "If you were at liberty, I—"

Nana, unfortunately, could hear no more. This conversation vexed her. She was dying to utter a few plain truths to this extremely proper personage. But suddenly the sight of a party of new arrivals paralyzed her. They were all women, very *chic*, *en grande toilette* with all their diamonds. They went to Laure, to whom they spoke in the most familiar manner. They seemed to have been inspired by some evil genius to come there with a hundred thousand francs' worth of precious stones, and dine at three francs per head, merely to fill the poor forlorn creatures who were generally there, with jealous astonishment.

When they came in talking and laughing loudly, bringing in the outer air like sunshine, Nana quickly turned away, annoyed at seeing among them Lucy Stewart and Maria Blond. For five minutes or more, all the time that these women were chatting with Laure, before they passed on to the next room, she kept her head well down, and was very busy rolling the crumbs of bread together on the table cloth.

When she turned round, she was stupefied. The chair next her was empty; Satin had disappeared.

"Where on earth is she?" she exclaimed.

The stout person who had previously overwhelmed Satin with little attentions laughed in an ill-natured way. And as Nana, irritated by this laugh, looked at her threateningly, she said, in a drawling, insinuating voice:

"It was not I, I assure you. It was the other person who got her away from you."

Then Nana, seeing that she was being laughed at, relapsed into silence. She lingered a few moments to show that she was not angry. From the next salon came the sound of Lucy Stewart's voice, who was entertaining a whole tableful of young girls, about to go to the balls at Montmartre and at La Chapelle. It was excessively warm. The servant was constantly passing her with piles of dirty plates. The four young men were paying for wine which the women were to drink, hoping that they would then be tipsy and funny.

The thing which exasperated Nana most of all was paying for Satin's dinner. She was a nice sort of friend to have! One who would come and gobble up all she could get, and then disappear with the first fool who came along, without so much as saying thank you!

It was only three francs, to be sure; but that made no difference; it was the thing itself that enraged her. She paid the money, tossing the six francs to Laure, whom she despised at that moment as much as she did the mud in the gutters.

In La Rue des Martyrs, Nana felt her anger increasing. She certainly was not going to run after this Satin. She was indignant with herself for ever having cared for her. Her evening was spoiled, however, and she turned her face homeward, furious with every one, but more especially with Madame Robert. What airs the woman put on! What did she mean by them? She felt sure now that she had met her at the *Papillon*, a low bastringue in La Rue des Poissonnière.

And this was the woman who had refused to come to her house for supper—who received only merchants and bankers, and who set up for being so virtuous. It was

always just such people who hid their sins in corners and hoped to escape unrecognized.

Meanwhile Nana, all the time ruminating on these things, had reached her home in La Rue Véron. She was disturbed by seeing the light. Fontan had returned quite out of temper, for he too had paid for his friend's dinner, and been then deserted by him.

He listened coldly to the explanations that she gave—stammering in her eager haste to exculpate herself from any suspicions he might have formed. She was terrified at finding him there, for she had not looked for him until after midnight. She told a falsehood, admitted that she had spent six francs, but said that she had been with Madame Maloir.

He did not unbend in the least, but presently handed her a letter which the concierge had brought up for her—the seal of which he had coolly broken.

It was a letter from Georges, still shut up at Fondettes, who solaced himself each week by writing burning letters. Nana was always delighted when people wrote to her, particularly if they used enthusiastic phrases and swore eternal love. She read such letters aloud to every one.

Fontan knew the style of the boy's letters, and always listened to them, but this night she was in such dread of a scene that she affected indifference, and, after glancing at it, threw it aside. Fontan stood at the window drumming on the glass, unwilling to go to bed at such an early hour, but not knowing what to do with the rest of the evening. He suddenly turned around.

"Why don't you answer this boy at once?" he asked abruptly.

It was generally he who answered these letters. He prided himself on his ability to do so. He took up the letter and read it aloud—after which Nana embraced him enthusiastically, telling him that he could write just as fine things in return. This pleased him, and the two were soon in the best of humors, and adored each other.

"Write now," she said, "and I will make tea—and then we will sup."

Fontan installed himself at the table with a great

display of pens, ink, and paper—rounded his arms and elongated his chin.

"My beloved," he began, speaking the words aloud.

He worked away after this fashion for more than an hour—reflecting upon a phrase with his head buried in his hands, and exulting whenever he found an especially tender expression.

Nana, meanwhile, swallowed two cups of tea in silence.

At last he read the letter, as letters are read on the stage, in a clear voice and with many gestures. He had written five long pages about "the delicious hours passed at La Mignotte—the recollection of which was like subtle perfume." He swore eternal fidelity to this "springtime of love," and ended by declaring that his only desire was "to live that season over again, if such seasons ever could be re-lived."

"You know, of course," said Fontan, interrupting himself, "that I say all this out of politeness. Of course, you and I know that it is all very ridiculous. I think, that it sounds pretty well, though!"

He was quite triumphant, but Nana committed the very great error of not at once falling into ecstacies. She said simply that the letter was very good—at which measured eulogium he became thoroughly vexed.

"If the letter did not please her, she could write another," he muttered; and instead of exchanging kisses, as was their habit, after he had written these passionate words, they sat coldly at opposite sides of the table. She poured out a cup of tea for him:

"How nasty!" he exclaimed, as he tasted it; "there is certainly salt in it.'

Nana, unfortunately, shrugged her shoulders at this, which made him perfectly furious.

Then a hot quarrel ensued—the clock showed that it was not yet ten o'clock, and they had nothing else to do. He called Nana all sorts of names; brought every possible accusation against her, and did not allow her to utter one word in self-defence. She was everything that was vile, he said over and over again.

Then the question of money arose. Had he spent six francs, he asked, because he had dined in town? If his

dinner had not been paid for by some one else, he should have been contented with the pot-au-feu at home. To waste money on that old woman, Maloir, was the most absolute folly in the world! If she showed her nose inside his door again, he should tell her so, and kick her out beside.

How long, he wondered, would it be before the wolf was at the door, if she spent six francs every day?

"In future," he said, "I shall keep the money, and then I shall know where we stand."

All his avaricious instincts were aroused. Nana, in great fright, submissively brought out all the money that remained and laid it on the table; until then it had been common property, and each went to it, as he or she pleased.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, after counting; "there are only seven thousand francs left out of seventeen thousand, and we have lived here just three months. It can't be possible!"

He rushed to the secretary, which he roughly shook, and taking out the drawer, carried it to the table to examine it by the lamp; but it was impossible to make more than six thousand eight hundred and some odd francs; whereupon ensued a tempest.

"Ten thousand francs in three months!" he growled. "What the devil have you done with them? Answer, I tell you. You gave it to your aunt, I believe, or to some man. Tell me what you have done with it."

"Why are you so angry?" answered Nana, trembling. "If you will calculate for yourself, you can see just where it is gone. You have not counted the furniture nor the linen which I was compelled to buy; money goes fast in that way."

He, although he had exacted an explanation, would not listen to one word she said.

"Yes," he said, more calmly, "it does go quickly, and too quickly. Look here, my girl, I am tired of this community of goods. You know that these seven thousand francs belong to me, and I shall keep them; for upon my life I don't see why, because you are a spendthrift, I should be ruined. Every one must look out for himself!"

With a lofty air he put the money in his pocket. Nana looked at him in a dazed sort of way.

"You see I am not quite such a fool to keep aunts and children who don't belong to me. If it pleases you to spend your money in that way, it is your own affair; but I swear you shall not touch mine, and from to-night we turn over a new leaf."

At this, Nana rebelled; she could not restrain the words:

"But haven't you been living on my ten thousand francs? It seems to me that you are a little piggish—"

He did not allow her to finish, but leaning over the table, gave her a quick box on the ear, saying,

"Repeat that, if you dare!"

She repeated it, notwithstanding the blow, and he fell upon her, tooth and nail, and soon reduced her to such a state, that she ended by submissively undressing, amid her tears and going to bed. He was about doing the same, when he suddenly caught sight on the table of the letter he had written to Georges. He took it up, folded it carefully, and turning toward the bed he said, in a threatening tone:

"The letter is good; I shall put it in the post myself, because I don't like any of your caprices. And now stop crying; you worry me."

Nana, who was sobbing, tried to check herself, and stifled her very breathing; and when he was at her side, threw herself into his arms. Their dissensions always ended in this way. She dreaded losing him, and felt she could not live without him.

But he was suspicious. He had taken it into his head that Nana was playing a part in order to obtain control of the money again. The candle was extinguished, and he felt that it was necessary to maintain his supremacy.

"You know, my girl, I am in earnest when I say I shall keep the money."

Nana, who had fallen asleep on his neck, answered, magnanimously:

"Yes. I am not afraid; I will work."

But after this night their life was a series of storms;

from the beginning to the end of the week there was a succession of slaps as regular as the tick of the clock, which seemed to mark their existence.

Nana seemed to have improved by her beatings; like fine linen, her skin had grown whiter under them. She was more beautiful than ever, and Prullière went quite crazy over her, coming to see her when Fontan was away and trying to kiss her; against which attempts she indignantly struggled, declaring that it was infamous for him to try and deceive his friend.

Prullière sneered at this, and declared that she was growing positively stupid. What could she see in that monkey —for Fontan looked exactly like a monkey, with his great nose that he could twist in every direction; besides he beat her. He knew it, and she might as well own up; and he drank, too.

"I dare say, but I love him all the same!" she answered one day, with the calm air of a woman who confesses to a disgraceful taste.

Bosc contented himself with dining there quite often. He shrugged his shoulders at Prullière: a good fellow, he said, but a foolish one.

He had many times been present at some of the scenes which were of constant occurrence, but when he saw Fontan, at dessert, hit Nana a slap, he went on eating quietly as if it were the most natural thing in the world. In order to offer adequate payment for his dinner, he became enthusiastic over the happiness of his hosts. He called himself a philosopher, and said he had renounced everything in this world, even glory.

Prullière and Fontan sometimes leaned back in their chairs, forgetting the table that stood with its dishes still before them, and talked until two o'clock in the morning about their past successes. Bosc listened to their theatrical declamation with silent indifference, and quietly finished the bottle of cognac. There was nobody like Talma left, so there was no use of talking about glory or success—it was too stupid.

One evening he found Nana in tears. She showed him her arms and shoulders, all bruised and black. He looked

at the skin without being tempted to touch it, as that idiot of a Prullière would have done. Then he said sententiously:

"My girl—wherever women are there must be fights and blows. It was Napoleon who said that, I believe. Wash your bruises in salt water; it is good for bruises. You will have plenty more, and don't complain so long as no bones are broken."

But Madame Lerat was not so philosophical. Each time that Nana showed her a new black and blue spot she uttered loud cries of woe. Her niece would be killed yet, and this sort of thing must end. Fontan had told Madame Lerat flatly that he did not wish to see her at his house, and whenever she came after that and he was heard coming in, she was obliged to retreat through the kitchen, which was to her a terrible humiliation. She was not, therefore, inclined to be especially charitable in her judgment of this personage. She declared that he had been very badly brought up—saying this with the air of a high-born dame whose opinion on such subjects was of value, and who had nothing to learn on similar points.

"Oh!" she said to Nana one day, "he is ignorant of the commonest decencies of life—his mother must have been the commonest of the common! You need not say a word—I know it. I don't speak for myself, although a woman of my age is, in my opinion, entitled to respect. But I can't understand how you can put up with his bad manners, for, without flattering myself, I think I can say that I taught you how to behave, and you have always had from me the very best advice. You know perfectly well that such performances were never known in our family before!"

Nana did not argue, but listened with bowed head.

"Then," continued the aunt; "you have known many distinguished persons. Zoé and I were talking about it only last evening at my house. She can't understand you any better than I can. She said to me: 'To think how Madame led the Count—who was such a perfect gentleman. She managed him just as she pleased, and now that she lets herself be abused by this Merry Andrew!'

"I," continued Madame Lerat, "said, in reply, that I

might endure the blows, but the want of respect I would not stand. And you have ruined yourself for a bird like that! Yes; ruined yourself, my dear—you need not shake your head. Are there not rich men, wise men—persons at the head of the Government, who are dying for a look from you?

"But I won't say any more, and I did not mean to say as much. I think only of your own happiness; but, if I were you, at the very first rough speech from his mouth, I should say, 'Sir, for what do you take me?' You know how to say it better than I can tell you, and your grand air would take him off his feet quick enough!"

Then Nana burst into tears and sobbed,

"Oh, aunt, I love him!"

The truth was, Madame Lerat felt very anxious when she saw the difficulty with which Nana paid her boy's board. She was willing to keep the little fellow, however, and wait for better days. But the idea that it was Fontan who prevented the mother and son from being up to their ears in gold, was more than the aunt could endure with patience. She concluded, therefore, with these words:

"Listen! The day will come when you will come to me for protection from this brute. Knock at my door, and I will open it to you then."

Very soon Nana had little thought for anything but money. Fontan had walked off with the seven thousand francs. They were undoubtedly in some safe place, but she never ventured to question him, for she was extremely cautious with this "bird," as Madame Lerat called him. She trembled lest he should think her capable of clinging to him on account of this miserable little sum.

He had promised to furnish her with the money for their daily expenses, and he began by giving her three francs every morning. But he was as exacting as if it had been fifty that he had handed her. He wanted everything—butter, meat, early vegetables and fruit,—and if she ventured to expostulate, if she insinuated that he could not have the whole market for three francs, he flew into a passion, and declared that she was feathering her own nest, that she was extravagant, and a fool whom all the market people cheated. He declared he would go some-

where else to live, that she was no kind of a manager. Then, at the end of a month, he forgot to put the three francs in the morning on the corner of the chimney piece. She asked for them several times with great timidity; and then came more dissensions and little quarrels. In short, he made her life so intolerable that she finally preferred not to rely on him.

He went off as gay as a lark, when he had not left the three francs behind him, and on coming home to dinner was quite charmed to find it ready for him. He kissed Nana gayly, and sang and danced about the room with the chairs; while she, poor thing, was quite happy, having reached the point where she did not wish him to give her anything, notwithstanding the difficulty she had in making both ends meet. One day she handed him three francs, saying that she had still in hand the money of the day before. As he had given her nothing the day before, he hesitated, anticipating a lecture. But she looked at him with such loving eyes, and kissed him with such passionate devotion, that he pocketed the silver pieces with the trembling haste of a miser who sees his precious money endangered.

After this day he gave himself no further trouble nor ever once asked whence came the money by which he was fed. He was out of temper when a dish of potatoes was his only dinner, and smiled from ear to ear before a turkey or a leg of mutton, without omitting, even in his best moods, an occasional slap on Nana's face.

Nana had found a way of providing the table. The house, on certain days, was overflowing with food. Twice each week Bosc ate there until he had a fit of indigestion. One evening, when Madame Lerat was going away, she discovered a rich dinner cooking in the kitchen, and indignant that she was not to partake of it, she asked roughly who paid for it.

Nana, taken by surprise, burst into tears.

"Ah, well, it is all right enough," said her aunt, who understood her.

Nana was resigned to all things, so anxious was she for peace in the house. It was, beside, the fault of La Tricon, whom she had met in La Rue de Laval one day when

Fontan had gone out in a rage because of a dish of codfish which he did not like.

Then she said yes to La Tricon, who was in considerable trouble because so many of her ladies were travelling. As Fontan never came in until six o'clock, she disposed of her afternoons, which brought her in fifty or sixty francs—sometimes more.

She might have demanded ten or fifteen louis if she had managed well, but she only cared to keep the pot boiling; and when evening came she threw all this aside, and forgot everything in the presence of Bosc, who was stupid from over-eating, and of Fontan, who, with his elbows on the table, allowed himself to be kissed on the eyelids with the condescension of a man who feels that he is adored for himself.

Thus, in her love for this man, Nana had gone back to her early life. She dragged her old slippers over the sidewalks, as she had done in her girlhood.

She made up her quarrel with Satin, after having flown at her, as if ready to tear out her eyes.

The two went again to Laure's, eating there whenever Fontan dined in town. Nana was amused by the stories she heard there, by the jealousies and amours she discovered amid the clatter of knives and forks; and as she was not of a revengeful disposition, she ended by exchanging civilities with Madame Robert; so that on the days when the latter came to meet Satin, it was Nana who lectured Satin for making the other wait.

Laure, who evinced toward Nana an almost maternal affection, had invited her several times to her villa at Asnières—a large country house, surrounded by shade trees and a beautiful great garden. But Nana refused. She was afraid. Satin swore to her that she was mistaken, and that gentlemen from Paris would swing her and would play croquet with her; so Nana promised to accept the invitation later.

It was then that she went out, with Satin for a companion, and beat the streets, jostled by all the vicious creatures who stood under the gas-lamps, and tramped through the mud. Nana returned to the Bastringues where she had danced in her earliest girlhood. She saw

once more the obscure corners of the outer boulevards, the very places where, when she was but fifteen, her father had come to look for her. Satin and Nana haunted all these places, climbed all these stairs, wet and dirty, or they planted themselves in the shelter of doorways. Satin, who knew the Quartier Latin perfectly well, took Nana there, as well as to Bullier, and to the Brasseries of the Boulevard Saint-Michel.

But the vacations had arrived—the Quartier des Ecoles was desolate and they returned to the Grands Boulevards, and to the Rué du Faubourg Montmartre. It was here that they had better luck. From the heights of Montmartre to the Observatoire they scoured the town. There were evenings when their boots were wet through and through, warm evenings when their garments were as if glued to their skins—endless walks, interminable lounges —quarrels and brutalities, oaths and insults, and such was the history of this time and season.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

THE summer ended at last, and a stormy summer it had been, with hot and exhausting nights. The two women set forth together one evening after dinner. On either side of la Rue Notre Dame de Lorette, the sidewalks displayed two rows of women keeping close to the wall and hurrying toward the Boulevard with a busy air. Nana and Satin went with the others, until they came within a few hundred yards of the Café Riché, when they dropped their dresses, which until then they had held high from the dust, with careful hands, and then, with entire disregard of dust, allowed their trains to sweep the sidewalk, walking slowly when they reached the long line of light that streamed from a café. They laughed as they talked to each other with heads held high, and seemed thoroughly at home in the crowd. Their faces were powdered, their lips touched with red, and their eye-lashes darkened, which imparted to their faces, in the semi-darkness, something of the air of a third-rate oriental beauty from a bazar.

Until eleven o'clock, all the while the crowd was at its thickest, they were gay enough—frowning occasionally, or hurling a sharp "fool" after some awkward fellow whose heel had caught in their dresses; they exchanged familiar nods with the waiters of the café, stopped at some of the tables, accepted the offered "treats," which they slowly drank, like persons who are glad of a seat where they could wait until the theatres were over.

But as the night wore on the noise grew louder, and among the trees along the Boulevards, there was much chattering and many blows; while honest families—mothers and fathers with their young daughters—accustomed to such things, passed quietly on without haste, and as if they neither saw nor heard. After going at least ten times from the Opera to the Gymnase, Nana and Satin

decided that the Rue du Faubourg Montmartre was their best promenade.

There, until two o'clock, at all the doors of the restaurants and cook shops, the ale houses and the cafés, stood a crowd of women. Here compacts were agreed upon. The evenings that Nana and Satin returned unsuccessful they disputed between themselves.

La Rue Notre Dame de Lorette was deserted at this hour, except by an occasional shadow—some poor *fille*, hungry and weary, creeping slowly back to her miserable garret, or entreating hoarsely some tipsy fellow whom she met at the corner.

There were sometimes, to be sure, successful sorties—louis obtained from gentlemen, who put their decorations in their pockets, as they came up the street. Satin understood men. She knew precisely the state of the atmosphere which affected them, and she kept her eyes on the best dressed, for she knew that the varnish cracked easily, and that baseness showed itself under the smallest temptation. She declared that of two men—one in the carriage and one on the box—the coachman was much the best, because men of that class respected women, as a rule, much more than so-called gentlemen. Nana was constantly in a state of surprise at what she saw and heard; she had preserved some prejudices which Satin had entirely shaken off. Sometimes they talked gravely together: Was there no good left, then? was everybody corrupt, from the highest to the lowest? was there no delicacy in Paris from nine o'clock in the evening until three o'clock in the morning? She wondered, if they could see into all the rooms, if there would not be some strange sights, and if there would not be some great personages taken aback if they were detected in their iniquities. Her education was in a fair process of being completed.

One evening, as she came for Satin, she recognized the Marquis de Chouard, who was crawling down the stairs with a very pale face, and clutching the rail.

She put her handkerchief to her face—she did not wish to be recognized. She went on, and entering Satin's room, found it in a state of frightful dirt and disorder. She asked how she happened to know the Marquis. Satin answered

that she had known him a long time; he had bored her to death as long ago as she lived with her pastry-cook, and even now he came to see her occasionally.

"But," Satin continued, "he disgusts me, and I won't have him here any more."

About this time, Satin inspired her with a great horror of the police, and continually poured stories into her ears on that subject. Satin told how, more than once, a friend had come to her assistance—a certain *agent des mœurs*—and prevented her being put on the list; but there was no hope for her now, if the attention of the police was once awakened.

The agents arrested as many women as possible, and one night they had taken in over thirty *filles*. Satin proudly said, however, that she now knew all the ropes, as well as the faces of the agents, and as soon as she saw one coming she fled, with many other frightened creatures. So great was the terror felt by these *filles*, that they stood sometimes as if paralyzed at the doors of the cafés, although they saw what was sweeping down upon them.

Satin feared, more than all else, being denounced. Her pastry-cook had threatened her when she left him; for he, like many other men, was base enough to wish to live on his friend. Yes, indeed, this man might denounce her, or even some woman who was jealous of her and angry that she was prettier than she, might do it.

Nana listened to all this with ever increasing terror. She had always trembled before the law—that unknown, mysterious power—that vengeance of man—by which she could be suppressed suddenly without a human being knowing where she was. Saint-Lazare was in her eyes a deep ditch—a black hole where women were buried alive after their hair was cut off. She said to herself that, were she to leave Fontan, it were easy enough for her to find a protector.

Satin in vain explained that at the Prefecture were lists of women, accompanied by photographs that the agents consulted respectfully, as they were forbidden even to lay a finger on the originals. Nana none the less pictured herself as exposed to the insult of a visit which might come any day. This thought filled her with anguish and shame—shame which had been hitherto an unknown sensation to her.

One evening, toward the end of September, she was with Satin on the Boulevard Poissonnière, when all at once her companion began to run, saying, in a hoarse whisper,

"The agents! Come on! come on!"

Then began a mad chase through the crowd—skirts and ribbons flying, cries and blows resounding. A woman fell. The crowd looked on with brutal stolidity, or with brutal laughter, and watched the pursuit of the agents. Nana lost Satin, and with paralyzed limbs waited for the worst, sure of being arrested. A man caught her by the arm and took her away, almost from the grasp of the indignant agent; it was Prullière, who had recognized her. Without a word, he turned her into La Rue Rougemont, then deserted, where she could hardly breathe, and was so nearly fainting that he was obliged to support her. She did not even thank him.

"Come," he said at last; "you must come to my rooms and recover yourself."

He lived near by, but she would not consent. She positively refused. She loved Fontan too much to run the risk of offending him.

Prullière regarded this excessive delicacy as misplaced and stupid, and in his wounded vanity was mean-spirited enough to say:

"Very well. Go your own way—only remember, my dear, I shall not help you out of your difficulties again!"

And he left her. All her terror returned, and she made an enormous detour to reach Montmartre, keeping close to the shops, and turning very pale whenever she saw a man coming.

It was the next day after this great shock and terror, that Nana, going to see her aunt, found herself face to face with Labordette, in a little quiet street at Batignolles. At first, they both seemed uncomfortable. He had an affair going on which he wished to hide, but was, nevertheless, the first to recover himself and to express his pleasure at this happy meeting. Every one, he said, was still stunned and in despair at her total eclipse. The public clamored for her, and her old friends missed her. Finally, he became quite paternal and sermonized her.

"Of course, my dear," he said, "you will do just what

you please, but, between ourselves, I must say frankly that I think you very stupid. We all understand a sudden caprice; only we don't understand why you should pocket affronts and blows. A nice state of things to be sure! He will take your skin next! I suppose you are thinking of applying for the prize of constancy?"

She listened with an embarrassed air, protesting and defending by exclamations, the person whom neither of them named.

When, however, he alluded to Rose, who was exhibiting the Comte de Muffat as her latest prize, her eyes flashed.

"Oh!" she murmured, "if I chose—"

He, at once, with the most obliging air in the world, offered to be the mediator.

"Shall I arrange it all?" he said. "I often see the Count. He turns pale now whenever he hears your name."

But she refused.

"No; I do not wish you to do anything of the kind. Mignon says I have no sense; but, one day, I said to him, 'That may be; but, any way, if I had a husband like you, I should be a very rich woman!"

Labordette pretended to think this reply very clever. Then he attacked her in another direction. He told her that Bordenave was about to bring out a new piece of Fauchéry's, in which was a superb rôle for her, and he was sure that she could have it if she asked for it.

"What! a piece in which there is a rôle that would suit me! And he has said nothing to me about it!"

She was speaking of Fontan. All at once, however, she calmed herself. She would never enter a theatre again, she said. Labordette evidently did not believe her, for he continued to urge her, smiling all the time.

"Why do you say this? Why will you not let me serve you? You know very well that you may trust me. I will prepare your Muffat, and will bring him to you as meek as a lamb."

"No," she said, energetically.

And she left him. Her heroism touched even herself. There was not a man in the world, she thought, who would make such a sacrifice without trumpeting it abroad. One

thing, however, struck her forcibly: Labordette had given her precisely the same advice as Francis had done.

In the evening, when Fontan came in, she questioned him in regard to this piece of Fauchéry's. He, for two months, had been again at the Variétés. Why had not he told her of the new piece and this especial rôle?

"What rôle?" he said, in his ferocious voice. "You probably mean the great lady in the play! Upon my life, you are a modest creature! Do you think you could take that part, my dear? Why it would crush you to the earth. I never heard such a joke!" And he laughed.

She was horribly wounded. All that evening he tortured her, and called her Mademoiselle Mars. And the more he said, the more amiable she showed herself, feeling a bitter pleasure in the recollection of the heroism which made her great in her own eyes.

All this time—ever since she had assumed the expenses of the ménage—her love for him had been steadily growing. The disgust she felt at the manner in which she earned the money she expended for him seemed to increase her love.

He had become her pet joy, for which she paid dearly; her paramount need, without which she could not live. The very cuffs and kicks had grown to be a part of her life. He, seeing what a good beast of burthen she had become, abused her patience still more. She affected his nerves, he said, and he had almost come to hate her;—although he knew it was to his interest to continue to bear with her.

When Bosc said something to him on this point, he fell into a fury, without any one knowing precisely why, and cried out that he hated her and her good dinners, and that he meant to get rid of her, and bestow his seven thousand francs on some other person.

This was the beginning of the end.

One night about eleven Nana, coming in, found the door shut and bolted. She knocked—no reply. She knocked again—still no reply; but seeing the light under the door and hearing Fontan moving about, she knocked a third and fourth time—still without calling or raising her voice angrily.

Presently she heard Fontan utter one word in a slow, deliberate way—a word that was an insult.

She struck the door with both hands.

He repeated the word.

She raised her hand and struck repeated blows on the resounding wood.

This went on for twenty minutes—the same word hissed through the key-hole, like an echo, to the appeals she made on the other side of the door.

Then, seeing that she had no intention of owning herself conquered, he threw the door open wide, and standing on the threshold, he said, in the same coldly brutal voice:

"How long, in the name of Heaven, do you intend to keep this up? Will you go away and let us be quiet? You see that I have company."

He was not alone. Nana saw the little woman from the Bouffes, with the red hair and the eyes like gimlets, sitting with the air of a proprietor on the furniture for which she had paid. Fontan took one step toward Nana, lifted his enormous hand:

"Be off with you," he cried, fiercely, "or I will strangle you."

Nana burst into nervous sobs; but she was frightened and ran away. This time it was she who was dismissed from her door.

The remembrance of Muffat, and the way in which she had treated him, flashed over her.

When she reached the sidewalk, her first idea was to go to Satin and remain with her all night.

She found her on the sidewalk, having been put out of doors by her landlord, who had placed a padlock on her door contrary to the law, for her furniture was still within. Satin cried and declared she would have justice. But in the meantime, as it was past midnight, a bed somewhere was a matter of necessity, and Satin, concluding that it were as well not to summon any police officer and let him mix himself up with her affairs, decided to take Nana to La Rue de Laval, to a lady whom she knew, who let furnished lodgings.

There they were given, on the first floor, a small room

with windows opening on the court-yard. Satin said: "I might have gone to Madame Robert's. There is always a corner for me. But, of course, I could not take you there, too. She is perfectly ridiculous with her jealousy. The other evening she beat me."

When they were settled for the night, Nana burst into tears and told the story of Fontan's conduct. Satin listened with all consideration, consoled her, and uttered some abuse of men as a class.

As they talked they heard a sudden uproar in the house. Satin started up and listened.

"The police!" she said, turning pale, "and not the least chance for us. We are caught like rats in a trap."

She had told Nana more than twenty times stories of the raids made by the police on the Hotels; but this precise night, as they took refuge in La Rue de Laval, neither of them had thought of any danger. At the word police Nana lost her head. She leaped from the bed, ran across the room, and opened the window, like a mad woman who means to throw herself out. Fortunately, the little court-yard was shut in, and had a grating of iron over the glass. Nana did not hesitate when she made this discovery; she climbed over the window sill and disappeared into the darkness, her terror lending her speed, and her slight dress her only protection against the night air.

"Stop!" cried Satin, in terror. "Stop! You will kill yourself!"

Then, on hearing a knock at the door, she closed the window and threw Nana's clothes into a wardrobe. She was beginning to be resigned, and said, if her name should be put on the list, she was none the worse for it after all. She pretended to have just wakened, yawned and expostulated, finally opening the door, where stood a tall fellow with a dirty beard.

"Show your hands," he said. "You have no mark on your fingers. You are not a seamstress. Dress yourself and come along with me."

"I am not a seamstress," she said, boldly. "I am a burnisher."

She dressed herself, however, knowing very well that there was no discussion possible. Loud shrieks resounded

through the corridors. One girl caught at all the doors as she was hustled along, and absolutely refused to walk. Another, in whose room was a companion, pretended to be an honest woman and a wife, and talked of a suit at law. For more than an hour, heavy footsteps resounded on the stairs; doors were burst open, sharp voices were drowned in convulsive sobs, rustling skirts brushed against the walls, and all the sounds indicated a sudden awakening, and a departure as sudden, of a flock of women roughly hustled away by the agents under the command of a little officer who was very blond and very polite.

No one had betrayed her, and Nana was safe. She came back to the room, shivering with cold and fear. Her white hands were bleeding, torn by the rough grating. For a long time she sat on the edge of the bed, listening with her heart in her mouth. Toward morning, however, she fell asleep. But at eight o'clock she awoke, and hurriedly left the hotel and went to her aunt's. When Madame Lerat, who was taking her *café au lait* with Zoé, saw her appear at this hour, her disorderded dress and haggard face told her story without words, and her aunt understood it at once.

"What did I tell you!" she cried. "I knew it. Come in, child; come in! You will always be welcome here!"

Zoé had risen and murmured respectfully: "Madame has comé back to us. I expected Madame."

But Madame Lerat wished Nana to see little Louis at once, "Because," she said, "the child ought to know that his mother was there." Louis was still asleep—he was never well, his blood was thin. And when Nana bent over that poor little, white, pinched-up face, all that she had borne the last month seemed to culminate, and she burst into strangling sobs.

"Oh! my poor little boy! my poor little boy!" she cried.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW PLAY.

"THE Little Duchess," Fauchéry's new play, was in progress of rehearsal at the Variétés. This was the play of which Labordette had spoken to Nana.

The first act was just over, and the other was about to begin. Toward the front of the stage, on faded velvet arm-chairs, sat Fauchéry and Bordenave talking in suppressed voices, while the prompter, Father Cossard, a hump-backed fellow, occupied a straw chair, and turned over the manuscript, with a pencil between his lips.

"Well! what are you waiting for?" cried Bordenave, suddenly rapping furiously with his heavy cane. "Barillot, why don't they begin?"

"Monsieur Bose has disappeared," answered Barillot, who occupied the position of second Manager.

Then there was a tempest. Everybody shouted for Bose. Bordenave swore roundly.

"It is always the same thing!" he cried. "Hang it all! No matter how long one rings and waits, there is always some one missing. When one comes, another disappears; and then they grumble if they are kept later than twelve o'clock."

Presently, Bose appeared, as calm as a summer breeze.

"Bless me!" he said, gently, "have I been wanted? Why didn't you call me? I am to speak now, am I?—Good! Simonne says: 'the guests are arriving,' and I come in. Where am I to enter?"

"By the door, I should say," answered Fauchéry, sharply.

"Yes, but where is the door?"

This time Bordenave fell on Barillot, swearing at him, and striking the floor with his stick.

"Zounds!" he cried; "didn't I tell you to put a chair where the door is to be? Every day I have to say this

Barillot! Where the deuce is Barillot? Of course, it is he who has now gone!"

Barillot now appeared. He silently placed the chair, with a back rounded to meet the storm. And the rehearsal went on. Simonne, wearing her hat and furs, assumed the air of a chambermaid arranging the furniture. She interrupted herself to say:

"I am so cold that I keep my hands in my muff."

Then she cried to Bose in a totally different voice:

"Ah, Monsieur le Comte! You are the first to come, sir, and Madame Augusta will be delighted."

Bose had on muddy pantaloons and a heavy yellow overcoat, with a big scarf rolled around his neck. With his hands in his pockets and an old hat on his head, he said, in a sullen sort of voice:

"Don't disturb your mistress, Isabelle; I wish to surprise her."

The rehearsal continued. Bordenave sank back on his chair and listened with a weary air. Fauchéry, more nervous by far, fidgeted and changed his position, and seemed to be possessed by a constant desire to interrupt; which desire he repressed. Suddenly behind him, in the dark theatre, he heard a whisper. He turned, and detected a shadow in the obscurity of a baignoire.

"Is there any one there?" he asked, leaning toward Bordenave; "is she there?"

Bordenave answered with an affirmative nod. Nana, to whom he had offered the rôle of Augusta, had wished first to see the piece, because she could not quite make up her mind to accept the rôle of a *cocotte*. The part of an honest woman was the one she coveted. She nevertheless occupied the *baignoire* with Labordette, who had officiated as go-between, and had brought Bordenave and herself together. Fauchéry looked once more very earnestly about the house, and then continued to follow the rehearsal.

One gas-burner, with a tin reflector, threw all the light on the front of the stage, and seemed a huge yellow eye, glaring through the obscurity with a certain sadness. Cossard supported the manuscript against the narrow pipe, in order to see better, and stood in the full glare of the light,

thus throwing into bold relief his hunchback in profile. Bordenave and Fauchéry were half in obscurity, sitting as they did in the space between the dark house and this glare. A large lantern was hung on one side of the stage, in whose glasses all the actors were reflected, grotesquely exaggerated.

The rest of the stage was filled with a gray mist,—like the dust arising from a building when pulled down,—through which were vaguely seen ladders and trestles, screens and decorations, whose faded colors looked like mere piles of rubbish. Above were the curtains, which looked like rags hung out as signs before some vast establishment of old clothes. Up high the sunlight streamed in through an open window, cutting as with a bar of gold and dark semicircle, which thus became even more dark and dreary with the misery of this dismal spot, and its damp, dreary corners more fully displayed.

Meanwhile, far in the rear, in the darkness and the shadow, the actors who were in the piece, stood talking and awaiting their cues. Unwittingly, they had raised their voices.

"Will you hold your tongues?" roared Bordenave, leaping madly in his arm-chair. "I cannot hear one single word. Go out of here, if you must talk—we have to work. Barillot, if anybody speaks again I will turn every soul out of doors."

They were all silent for a few moments, sitting in a little group upon a bench and some rustic chairs in a corner of the garden—the setting of the first scene ready for the evening. Fontan and Prullière were listening to Rose Mignon, to whom the manager of the Folies Dramatiques had just made a superb offer. But a voice called out:

"The Duchesse! Saint Firmin!"

At the second call, Prullière remembered that he was Saint Firmin. Rose, who played the Duchesse Hélène, was waiting for him. Slowly and languidly dragging his feet over the sonorous boards, old Bose returned to find a seat. Clarisse offered him a part of her bench.

"What is the use of howling like that?" she said, speaking of Bordenave. "He was pleasant enough a little while

ago. If a new piece is rehearsed, he always goes on like that nowadays."

Bosc shrugged his shoulders; he did not care for any of these storms. Fontan sneeringly said:

"He expects a failure, I fancy; I do, at all events, for I think this piece idiotic."

Then addressing Clarisse, and remembering what Rose had told them, he said:

"Do you believe in that story about the Folies? Three hundred francs for each appearance, for one hundred nights! Why not a country house, I wonder? If three hundred francs were offered to his wife, Mignon would let Bordenave slide."

But Clarisse believed in these three hundred francs. The discussion that ensued was excessively bitter, but it was interrupted by Simonne, shivering as she came off the stage. Everybody was buttoned up to the chin, and they all looked up to that sunlight, which seemed to hover over their heads as if loath to descend upon the chilly, dismal stage. Outside, it was freezing—a sharp, November day.

"And not a particle of fire in the Foyer!" said Simonne. "It is perfectly abominable: he is getting as mean as dirt. I am going away; I don't wish to take cold."

"Silence! will you?" thundered Bordenave again.

After this, for ten minutes, nothing was heard but the confused recitation of the actors. They hardly took the trouble to gesticulate, and saved their voices wherever they could; when they emphasized a phrase they glanced at the house, which yawned before them, a dark abyss, over which hung a vague shadow like the fine dust that floats in a high loft without windows. It was a pitifully gloomy place, lighted only from the stage—sleepy and melancholy. The painting on the ceiling was totally obscured by the darkness. Over the balconies and seats were thrown gray coverings, to protect the velvet from dust and dirt, and the railings up to the upper gallery were guarded in the same way, while huge breadths of cloth were suspended at the right and left of the stage to keep the dust away from the hangings. Amid the general obscurity and uniformity of tint, the loges were hardly perceptible; the red velvet chairs within them looked black.

The chandelier, drawn way down, filled the orchestra, and suggested a general moving, a departure of the public on a journey from which they could never return.

Rose, in her part of the little Duchess, who had rashly and wilfully entered the rooms of a *fille*, advanced to the front of the stage, raising her hands and exclaiming, with an adorable smile addressed to this dark and empty house, "Good heavens! what queer people!"

She said these few words in a tone and with a manner which she was sure would produce an effect.

In the very back of one of the *baignoires* sat Nana, wrapped in a shawl, listening with all her ears and devouring Rose with her eyes. She turned toward Labordette and said, in a low voice,

"You are sure he will come?"

"Perfectly sure," he answered. "He will come with Mignon merely to have an excuse. As soon as he appears you will go up to Mathilde's dressing-room. I will take you there."

They were speaking of Count Muffat. Labordette had managed this interview on neutral ground. He had had a serious conversation with Bordenave, who had made two unfortunate speculations and was becoming involved, and Bordenave was quite ready to lend his theatre and offer a rôle to Nana, with the hope, probably, of placing the Count under an obligation which he could repay by making him a loan.

"And this part of Augusta—what do you think about it?" asked Labordette.

But Nana did not reply. After a first act, where the Duc deceived his wife for the fair Augusta, an operatic star, the Duchesse Hélène came, in the course of the second act, to the house of the actress, on the night of a bal masqué, to learn by what magic power these women conquered and retained their husbands. It was a cousin, the handsome Oscar de Saint Firmin, who introduced her there, with the hope of earning her eternal gratitude.

As a first lesson, she heard Augusta talking like a quarrelsome ploughboy to the Duc, while he listened in the

most amiable manner, which elicited from the Duchesse the exclamation:

"Is it thus that we must talk to men!"

There was little in this scene for Augusta. As to the Duchesse, she was well punished for her curiosity. An old beau, the Baron de Tardeveau, took her for a *cocotte*, and was altogether too cordial in his attentions, while on the other side of the stage, the Duc made his peace with Augusta.

As the rôle of the *cocotte* was not yet given out, Father Cossard was compelled to read it. The rehearsal was dragging along when Fauchéry, all at once, started up—his nerves could bear it no longer.

"This won't do at all!" he cried.

The actors all stopped, their hands fell at their sides, and Fontan asked, in his most insolent tone:

"And what is it, pray, that won't do? Who is wrong?"

"Everything is wrong—everybody is wrong!" cried Fauchéry, himself walking up and down the boards and gesticulating. "See here, Fontan, you must do better with this part of Tardeveau. You must lean over with a gesture like this to seize the Duchess. And you, Rose, you must turn round quickly, like this, only not too soon—not until you hear a kiss—"

He interrupted himself, and called out to Cossard, in the heat of his explanations:

"Augusta, kiss him. Loudly—so that you can be heard."

Father Cossard, turning toward Bose, made a most vigorous noise with his lips.

"Good! now we have the kiss," said Fauchéry, triumphantly. "Now another kiss. You see, Rose, I have had time to turn around and I utter a little shriek, and say, 'Ah! she kissed him!' By that time Tardeveau returns to the charge. You understand, Fontan—you attack the Duchesse again. Come now, try it again. All together!"

The actors began once more, but Fontan with such unwillingness that the whole thing dragged as badly, if not worse, than before.

Twice again did Fauchéry repeat his instructions, and each time with more energy and some little heat. They

all listened to him with a mournful air, looking at each other much as if he had asked them to walk on their heads, then made an awkward attempt to carry out his instructions, moving with the stiffness of puppets whose springs were broken.

"Well! it is too much for me! I can't do it, I fear—for I really don't understand what you want!" said Fontan, finally, with his insolent swagger.

Bordenave had not opened his lips. He was half-buried in his arm-chair, and little more was to be seen of him than the brim of his hat, which was pulled down over his eyes, while his cane stood between his legs. He seemed to be asleep. Suddenly he straightened himself up.

"My dear fellow!" he exclaimed, turning to Fauchéry. "My dear fellow, it is idiotic!"

"Idiotic!" repeated the author, turning very pale. "You are idiotic yourself!"

Bordenave at this lost his temper. He repeated the word idiotic and, trying to find some epithet more forcible still, hit on the words "imbecile" and "foolish." The play would be hissed; the first act even would never be listened to. And Fauchéry, exasperated, not to say wounded, by these insults, which constantly recurred with every new piece, called Bordenave a brute. The manager lost all control over himself—he snorted like an ox, he thumped with his cane and howled out:

"In the name of heaven, shut up! A whole quarter of an hour has been wasted by your nonsense. Yes, nonsense! for there is no common sense in the corrections you have made. As for you, Fontan, don't you move. You, Rose, will do just as much as this, not a particle more, and then you come down. Now, go on. Cossard, begin at the kiss."

After this interruption there were some minutes of wild confusion. Then the rehearsal went on, but with no better success. Bordenave, with elephantine grace, attempted to demonstrate his idea of how it should be played, while Fauchéry sneered and shrugged his shoulders with pity.

Then Fontan wished to try his hand; Bosc offered his opinion, and Rose, in her fatigue, dropped into the chair which did duty as a door. No one knew what to do, and

finally Simonne, thinking she had heard her cue, came on too soon, which enraged Bordenave to such a degree that he gave his cane a formidable twirl and brought it down on the girl's back with a tremendous whack. He was in the habit of beating his women at rehearsals, no matter what his private relations with them might be.

She escaped with a shriek.

"Put that in your pocket!" he cried; "and I swear if I have any more of this nonsense, I will shut up this theatre!"

Fauchéry had banged his hat on his head and pretended to be going away; but he lingered at the back of the stage, and came back when he saw Bordenave seat himself, and took his own chair again. They sat side by side without moving or looking toward each other, while a profound and dismal silence hung over the whole house. The actors waited for some minutes; all of them had a crushing sense of defeat.

"Well! let us go on," said Bordenave, at last, in his ordinary voice, and perfectly calm.

"Yes, let us go on," repeated Fauchéry, "we will try this scene again to-morrow."

And they lay back in their chairs, the author and the manager, while the rehearsal went on, in the same indifferent dull way. During all this quarrel, the actors who were not in the scene kept up their own little affairs at the back of the stage, seated on the rustic benches and chairs. There was much laughing and many rough words. But when Simonne joined them, in a hot rage at the blow she had received, with her voice choked by tears, they turned toward her, saying that in her place they would have strangled the beast.

She dried her eyes, and nodded approval. She had made up her mind; she would leave him at once; she would accept Steiner's offer which he had made to her the night before. Clarisse was astonished, for Steiner had not a cent in the world, as she knew; but Prullière began to laugh, remembering the trick this Jew had played when he took up Rose, at the time he started his enterprise of the salt meadows. He knew that Steiner was meditating a new project—a tunnel under the Bosphorus,

perhaps. Simonne listened with much interest, ceased to weep, and promised to push his interests with the banker.

As to Clarisse, she raved for a week. That animal of a Faloise who had deserted her for Gaga's fascinations, was he not about to inherit a fortune from a very rich uncle? It was just her luck. And then, too, here was Bordenave giving her fifty lines, as if she were not able to play Augusta. She longed for this part, and hoped Nana would refuse it.

"Well! and what of me?" said Prullière, much vexed. "I have about three hundred lines; I think I shall throw up the part. It is one that is entirely unworthy of me. The play is a dull one, children, and will fall flat, mark my words."

Simonne, who had been talking with Barillot, came back all out of breath.

"They say Nana is in the house!" she cried.

"Where?" asked Clarisse, eagerly, rising to see better.

The rumor ran from one to another; all turned and gazed down into the darkness. The rehearsal itself was interrupted. Bordenave aroused himself once more.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "what has happened now? Will you go on with the act, and keep silent at the back there? It is perfectly insupportable."

In the baignoire, all this time, Nana had sat silent and watchful, following the piece. Twice had Labordette tried to make her talk, but she silenced him impatiently, giving him a peremptory knock with her elbow.

The second act was just finished when two dim forms were seen near the door of the theatre. As they cautiously and noiselessly moved down the aisle, Nana recognized Mignon and Comte Muffat, who silently saluted Bordenave.

"There they are!" she murmured, with a sigh of relief.

Rose Mignon had just finished speaking. Bordenave rose, saying that it was necessary to repeat the second act before they went on to the third; and, abandoning the rehearsal, he welcomed the Count with the most exaggerated politeness, while Fauchéry, on the contrary, affected to be busy with the actors, who crowded around him. Mignon whistled, with his hands behind his back and

his eyes fixed on his wife, who seemed to be a little nervous.

"Now, then, let us go up," said Labordette to Nana. "I will show you into the loge, and then come down for him."

Nana left the baignoire at once. Bordenave overtook her at the end of the corridor which ran along by the side of the stage, a dark passage where the gas burned night and day; and there he began to talk to her about the rôle of Augusta.

"It was made for you!" he cried, "absolutely made for you. You must come to-morrow and rehearse it!"

But Nana was cold and indifferent. She wished to see the third act before she committed herself by promises.

"Oh! the third act," he said, "is magnificent. The Duchess follows Augusta's example, which disgusts Beaurioage and cures him. The quid pro quo is delicious—Tardeveau comes to the house and thinks it is that of an actress—"

"And is Augusta there?" interrupted Nana.

"Augusta?" repeated Bordenave, a little awkwardly. "She has a scene, not long, but it is a good one, and was made for you, I believe. Now, will you take the part?"

Nana looked at him earnestly.

"We will see by-and-by," she answered, at last.

She joined Labordette, who was waiting for her on the staircase. All the theatre had recognized her. There was much whispering. Prullière was quite scandalized by this reappearance, and Clarisse was very uneasy in regard to the rôle she coveted. As to Fontan, he played indifference; it was not worth while to say hard things about a woman whom he had loved, he muttered. In reality he felt a bitter hatred towards this woman, whose fascinations had failed to touch him—whose beauty had palled upon him.

Meanwhile, when Labordette came back and went up to the Count, Rose Mignon saw in a flash all that was going on. Muffat was a fearful weight upon her. She was not interested in him, but the thought of being dropped in this way infuriated her. She abandoned the silence which

she usually maintained on these subjects to her husband, and said abruptly:

"Look here! Do you see what is going on? I tell you, if she is at her old tricks again—if she does as she did with Steiner—I will tear her eyes out!"

Mignon, calm, dignified and haughty, shrugged his shoulders with the air of a man who sees and understands everything.

"Hold your tongue," he whispered. "Will you oblige me by holding your tongue?"

He did know what was going on. He thoroughly understood Muffat. He knew that at a sign from Nana the Count would lie down on the ground and let her walk upon him. Passions like these are not to be struggled against. He knew men well, and saw all that could be done now was to reap all the advantage possible from the rupture. He would wait.

"Rose, to your place!" cried Bordenave. "The second scene is on again!"

"Go!" said Mignon; "let me manage this."

Then he turned and blandly complimented Fauchéry on his play.

"The play was a good one," he said; "only, why was the *grande dame* so very excellent? It was not natural." And he sneered as he asked who had sat for the Duc, Augusta's meek adorer.

Fauchéry was not in the least angry. On the contrary, he laughed. But Bordenave, glancing toward Muffat, looked much annoyed, whereat Mignon followed his example.

"Let us begin. In the name of Heaven let us begin," growled the Manager. "Come on, Barillot. And where the deuce is Bosc? What has he disappeared for now?"

Bosc lounged in quietly, and the rehearsal began again, just as Labordette carried off the Comte, who was pale and trembling at the idea of seeing Nana once more. The day after his rupture with her, he felt utterly forsaken and desolate, and allowed himself to be taken to see Rose, fancying that she might do much toward filling up the void in his life. He wished, moreover, to avoid all explanations with the Countess, and tried to forget Nana. In this forgetful-

ness was his only safety, as he well knew. But as time went on the thought of Nana regained all its ascendency. She regained it through his memory—through the weakness of his nature, through sensations which were all new to him, and in their tenderness were at times almost paternal.

The frightful scene of their rupture was well nigh forgotten. He no longer saw Fontan; he no longer heard Nana's words, as she scornfully ejected him from her door, and hissed those words in regard to the misdoings of his wife.

All this seemed to him now like mere words, the sound of which had perished, while his heart seemed to be in the grasp of an iron hand, each day firmer and more ferocious. The anguish became more and more intolerable. He was very unhappy. He accused himself of folly and insincerity, and said that had he really loved this woman she could never have deceived him. That which he felt at this time was like the sting of a former wound—no longer blind, passionate love; and yet he was haunted by a longing for the touch of Nana's hand—for her hair, her lips—for herself! When he remembered the sounds of her voice, he shivered from head to foot. He loved with all the unreasonableness of a miser, and with infinite delicacy. This love had taken such entire possession of him, that at Labordette's first word, suggesting a rendezvous, he was ready to throw himself at her feet by an irresistible impulse, and yet ashamed of an abandon which he felt to be ridiculous in a man like himself. But Labordette understood it all. He gave a new proof of his tact by leaving the Count at the foot of the stairs, with these simple words, carelessly uttered:

"The second row—the corridor at the right; push the door—it is not fastened."

Muffat was alone in the profound silence of this corner of the house. In passing before the Artists' Foyer he had seen through the open doors the dirt and disorder of this huge room. Daylight was no friend to its imperfections. He was surprised, however, on leaving the obscurity of the stage to find the narrow staircase so calm and quiet. He had seen it only at night, crowded with hurrying women.

The boxes were deserted, of course—the corridors empty, not a sound—not a human being; while through the square windows the pale November sun entered with yellow streaks, wherein danced the motes all undisturbed.

He was relieved by this silence and calm, and mounted the stairs slowly, that he might not lose his breath. His heart beat loudly—a deadly fear assailed him lest he should behave like a child, with tears and sobs.

On the landing of the first flight he leaned against the wall for a moment, certain of not being seen. With his handkerchief at his lips, he mechanically looked at the worn stairs, the railing polished by the constant friction of hands, the spotted walls—at all the evidences of poverty in this place, which were fully displayed by the crude light of this midday hour, when all the *filles* were asleep.

When he reached the second landing, he was obliged to step over a huge cat that lay curled up in the sunshine. With eyes half shut this cat guarded the house. In the corridor at the right, he had only to push the door open, as Labordette had said.

Nana was waiting for him.

Mathilde, a simple little creature, was not especially neat in her habits; her dressing-room was in great disorder, her toilette-table covered with chiffons and dirt; her rouge-pot stood on a chair, the straw seat of which was spotted by it. The paper on the walls and ceiling was spattered high with soapy water The smell was so intolerable, the odor of lavender so strong, that Nana threw open the window and leaned out for a minute to breathe. She saw Madame Bron, whose broom she had heard sweeping the green and mouldy stones of the narrow court-yard, which was always in shadow A canary bird hanging on a persienne uttered shrill notes. The noise of carriages was unheard in these streets, where reigned provincial peace; the greater space made the streets brighter and more cheerful.

Looking up, Nana saw the small shining windows in the galleries that ran across, and opposite the high houses in La Rue Vivienne, a photographer had erected on one roof a sort of box of blue glass. It was very bright and gay. Nana forgot why she was there, as she stood looking out

Suddenly, it seemed to her that some one knocked. She called out, "Come in!"

On seeing the Count, she closed the window, as she did not care to have that gossip, Madame Bron, hear the explanation. The two looked at each other seriously. Then, as he continued to stand as if glued to the floor, she said, with a laugh:

"Well! you have come again, have you, simpleton?"

His emotion was so great, that he seemed frozen. He called her Madame; he said he was happy to see her. Then, to hasten things, she became still more familiar.

"Come, now! It is not worth while to be so monstrously dignified! You wanted to see me, I suppose, and yet we stand looking at each other like two china dogs. We have each been in the wrong; but I forgive you!"

Whereupon, she declared that the Past should never again be reverted to. The Past was over. To this he assented with a grave bow. He was perfectly calm, but he had nothing to say—so great was the torrent of words that rushed to his lips. Unable to comprehend this coldness, she played a great card.

"I see you are reasonable at last," she said, with a constrained smile; "that is precisely what I hoped for. Now that we have made our peace, give me a shake of the hand, and let us always remain good friends."

"Good friends!" he murmured, with sudden and sharp uneasiness.

"Yes; it is foolish, possibly; but I care a great deal for your liking and your esteem. It troubles me when I remember how I left you, but, now that it is talked over and explained, we can, indeed we must, speak to each other civilly, I suppose—"

He started forward, as if to speak.

"Let me finish," she said. "No man ever has any reason to reproach me for any rude conduct, and I don't choose to begin with you."

"But it is not that!" he cried, violently. "Sit down and listen to me."

And, as if he were afraid that she would leave the room, he pushed her toward the chair, while he continued to walk up and down in increasing agitation The little room

was warm and quiet; no sound from without troubled its stillness; occasionally the canary bird in the window would utter a low trill, like the sound of a distant flute.

"Listen," he said, planting himself before her. "I came here to claim you—yes, to claim you. You know this perfectly well; why, then, do you speak to me as you do? you agree, do you not?"

Her head was held low, and she was mechanically scratching one of the red spots from the cane-seated chair with her nail. Seeing his anxiety, she delayed giving him any answer still longer.

At last she lifted her face, which had suddenly become very grave. She had succeeded in giving to her eyes an expression of profound sadness.

"Oh! it is impossible!" she said, slowly. "You and I can never try that again!"

"And why?" he gasped, his face contracting with anguish.

"Why? Zounds! because—it is impossible, and that is all there is about it. I don't wish it."

He gazed at her, with growing wonder in his dilated eyes, and then fell at her feet. She recoiled, and repeated over and over again:

"Oh! don't be so childish."

But he no longer heard her. At her feet on the floor, he threw his arms around wildly, and buried his face in her lap. He shuddered from head to foot, and drew his breath hard, with a long convulsive sob.

"Well!" said Nana, coldly and quietly, "what a boy you are!"

"Listen!" he answered, breathlessly. "I have seen a hôtel near the Parc Monçeau. I will gratify each one of your whims, but I will endure no rival near the throne. You are to be mine, and mine alone; this is the absolute condition. If you will consent, you shall have the most beautiful toilettes—laces and diamonds—everything that is of the rarest; horses and carriages—"

Nana at each of these offers shook her head; but as he

went on, speaking of settling money upon her, she began to lose her patience.

"Will you never have done bargaining with me?" she exclaimed. "I tell you I will not consent to your proposition," and she shook him off as she spoke.

He dropped into a chair, with his face buried in his arms, which were crossed upon the back, and Nana began to pace the room in her turn. She looked about at the squalid room—the dirt and the disorder fully displayed by the pale sunlight; then planting herself in front of the Count, she spoke, with stolid frankness and precision:

"How strange it is that rich men like yourself always think their money will buy them everything they want! What do I care for these presents? If you could give me the whole city of Paris, my answer would still be the same—no! no! Look round this room; it is poor and it is dirty, but I would live here with you if I loved you; but I could not live in a palace unless my heart were there, too. I tell you I care nothing for money; I trample upon it! I spit upon it!"

And she pretended to be greatly disgusted; then suddenly adopting an air of sentiment, she added, in a melancholy tone:

"I know something that is much better than money. Ah! if I could but have it!"

He raised his head slowly; hope lighted his haggard eyes.

"No; you cannot give it to me," she resumed. "It does not depend upon you, and that is why I spoke about it to you. Now let us have a little talk together. Do you know I should like to have the rôle of the honest woman in their new play?"

"What honest woman?" he murmured, in some astonishment.

"Their Duchesse Hélène, of course! If they think I will play Augusta, they are greatly mistaken. The part amounts to nothing—one short scene only; and that is not all, either. I have had quite enough of *cocottes;* I am tired to death of them all; and, really, people will soon begin to believe that I can't personate anything else, either on or off the stage; but I will have them all to understand that, when

I choose to be distinguée, nobody can play the part better than myself! Am I not *chic?* Look at me, now."

She retreated to the window; then came back most gingerly, bridling and swelling with the circumspect air of a great hen who does not wish to get her feet dirty. He watched her with tears in his eyes, entirely stupefied by this little comedy intruding upon his anguish. She paraded up and down several times, smiling and serene, managing her skirts gracefully and holding her head erect; and then once more stopping before him:

"Is not this the way I should do it?" she asked.

"Precisely," he murmured, struggling with his emotion.

"Don't I know how to act the part of an honest, respectable woman? I have practised it in the solitude of my own room, and I am convinced that there is not a single woman among them all who has my air—the air of a Duchesse who likes men in her own way; have you not noticed it? Besides, this is not all; I must be an honest woman, if only on the stage. I dream about it all the time, and it makes me miserable. I tell you I must play that part."

She had become very grave, and her voice was firm and sharp. She seemed to be sincere, and to suffer from the anxiety she felt. Muffat, still crushed by her refusal, listened to her words, but scarcely understood them. There was a long silence; only a fly buzzing on the window-pane, disturbed the profound quiet of the room.

"Do you not understand?" she said, abruptly. "You must make them give me the rôle."

He was amazed; then, with a despairing gesture, he answered:

"But that is impossible! You said yourself, only a few minutes ago, that it did not depend upon me."

She interrupted him, and with a shrug of her shoulders, said:

"You must go down-stairs at once, and you will say to Bordenave that I must have the rôle. Bordenave needs money, and you can lend it to him, as you seem to have plenty."

And as he did not answer, she began to grow angry.

"Very well; I understand! You are afraid of having trouble with Rose. I said nothing to you about her, for it was not worth while, and was too long a story; but when a man promises, or, rather, swears to a woman that he loves her forever, one does not go off the very next day with a newcomer. Yes, the wound is here—I remember it perfectly. I don't wish to have anything more to do with these Mignons, and you ought to have broken with them before you came to meet me here."

He contrived to be heard here as he uttered the disconnected sentence,

"I intend to break with Rose at once!"

Nana seemed satisfied on this point, and resumed:

"Then what is it that stands in your way? Bordenave? Bordenave is the master. I suppose you will say that Fauchéry comes after Bordenave—"

Here she dropped her voice, realizing that she had reached the most delicate point of the matter.

Muffat, with lowered eyelids, listened in silence. He had chosen to remain in ignorance of the attentions paid by Fauchéry to the Countess, and had ended in hoping that he had been mistaken in the convictions he had formed during that terrible night passed in the doorway of La Rue Taitbout. But he preserved a certain rancor, and the greatest possible repugnance to any allusion to the matter.

"But Fauchéry isn't so bad after all!" continued Nana, feeling her way—uncertain how things were between the friend and the husband. "Fauchéry is kind-hearted. Now, if you will just go to him—"

But the idea of such a step revolted the Count.

"No, no, never!" he cried.

She waited a moment. Certain words came to her lips; she wanted to say, "Fauchéry would refuse you nothing," but she felt that they might not be efficacious as an argument. She smiled, therefore, but the smile was so expressive that her meaning was as well conveyed as it could have been in words. Muffat turned pale, and, with a quick glance at her, turned his eyes away again, annoyed and disturbed.

"Ah! you are not obliging," she murmured at last.

"I cannot do it," he answered, in a tone of deep anguish. "Anything else—anything you will ask—but not that!"

She would not condescend to argue; there was a quicker way of dealing with him. She laid one of her little hands on his brow and gently pushed back his head, then leaning over him, she pressed a long, lingering kiss upon his lips. He shivered from head to foot and the sad eyes lighted with a fierce fire. She stood erect again.

"Go!" she said simply.

He went toward the door—she followed, and, as he was going out, threw her arms around him and drew him back.

"Where is the Hôtel?" she said, burying her face in his vest.

"Avenue de Villiers," he said.

"And there are carriages?"

"Yes."

"And laces—diamonds?"

"Yes."

"How good you are! You know just now that it was only jealousy. And I swear to you, that this time it shall not be as it was before; because you now understand what a woman requires. You will give me everything, won't you? Then why should I have anything to do with any one else!"

She kissed him again and again, and, as the door closed upon him, she drew a long breath. Heavens! what a foul smell there was in this dirty dressing-room of Mathilde's. It might have been very pleasant—because it was so sunny—if it had been clean. To get rid of this odor of rancid oil of lavender, she threw open the window, and, leaning out, tried to find something to interest her while she was waiting.

Muffat, meantime, was staggering down the stairs, a strange buzzing sound in his ears—impelled by a will stronger than his own. What should he say? In what way should he introduce a matter which was really none of his business? He reached the stage, and heard voices quarrelling. The second act was just over. Prullière

was in a rage because Fauchéry wished to cut one of his sentences.

"Cut them all," he cried; "I prefer you should do that. I have not three hundred lines, and you wish to cut those, do you? No; I have had enough of this sort of thing, and shall give up the rôle."

He drew from his pocket a small, tumbled book, and, twisting it up in his feverish hands, looked as if about to fling it at Cossard. His wounded vanity convulsed his pale face, his thin lips seemed to grow thinner, and he appeared to be utterly unable to conceal his emotions. The idea that he—Prullière, the idol of the public—should be forced to accept a part of three hundred lines! It seemed to him that there was an absolute convulsion in all social laws—something that would shake society to its foundation.

"Why don't you ask me to bring in letters on a tray?" he resumed, bitterly.

"Come now, Prullière, don't be so perverse," said Bordenave, coaxingly. "Fauchéry will manage some capital hits for you, I'm sure,—won't you, Fauchéry? In the third act you can add something, can't you?"

"And I must have the last word, when the curtain goes down," said the actor, obstinately. "I am entitled to that, at least."

Fauchéry shrugged his shoulders without a word: his silence gave consent, however, and Prullière thrust his book back into his pocket.

Bosc and Fontan, during this explanation, assumed an air of profound indifference. What did they care?—each for himself, was their motto.

All the actors now crowded around Fauchéry, plying him with questions, while Mignon lent a patient ear to Prullière's muttered complaints, at the same time watching Comte Muffat from the corners of his eyes.

The Count was standing at the back of the stage, unwilling to become involved in the dispute he heard. But Bordenave saw him, and hurried to meet him.

"What creatures these are!" he cried. "You can't imagine, my dear Count, the trouble I have with these people. Each is vainer than the other—quarrelling and

chattering all the time, like so many magpies. Confound them all, I say! But, pardon me, I must stop, for my anger is running away with me."

He relapsed into silence, and waited until the Count should speak. But the Count did not find speaking such an easy matter, and finally ended by saying, bluntly:

"Nana wants to take her rôle from Rose."

Bordenave started.

"Is the woman mad?" he exclaimed.

He looked at the Count, and seeing him so pale and agitated, he said to himself, "What the deuce does this mean?"

Another long silence. In his heart Bordenave was thinking that it would be ridiculous to give this big Nana the rôle of the Duchess—it would never succeed. He looked earnestly at Muffat, and called to Fauchéry to come to them.

The Count made a hasty gesture, as if to prevent him. Fauchéry did not hear, however. Fontan had him by the button-hole, and he was obliged to listen to the actor's interpretation of his part. Fontan asked if he should use the Marseillaise accent? He seemed to be in doubt on several points; Fauchéry was cold and impassive, showing little interest, and Fontan began to grow angry, and finally said, if he could not catch the spirit of his rôle it would be better for everybody that he should give it up.

"Fauchéry!" called Bordenave again.

Then the young author made his escape, only too glad to break loose from the actor, who was deeply wounded at his prompt departure.

"We won't stay here," said Bordenave. "Come on, gentlemen."

And, to get away from curious ears, he led the way to the store-room behind the scene.

Mignon, in great surprise, watched them disappear. They went down several steps and entered a square room, the two windows of which looked out on the court-yard; a cellar-like light came in through the dirty windows, close under the low ceiling. In this place was every imaginable rubbish; an indescribable collection of bric-à-brac; a nameless pell-mell of plates and cups of gilded

pasteboard, of red umbrellas and Italian vases, large and small; clocks of all sizes, firearms and bird-cages —the whole covered with a coating of dust an inch thick. An insupportable odor of iron-rust, rags, damp paper, glue and paste came up from this heap of rubbish, where some of the things had been accumulating for fifty years.

"Come in," said Bordenave; "we shall at all events be alone here."

The Count, in great annoyance, walked away, that the Manager might be alone with Fauchéry, when he made the proposal. The author was amazed.

"What on earth is the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing; only an idea has just come to us. Don't answer in a hurry. What do you think of Nana in the rôle of the Duchess?"

The author was horror-stricken.

"No, no! a thousand times no! But you are not in earnest?" he added, more quietly. "It would be ridiculous. Everybody would laugh."

"And I like people to laugh, it is a very good thing. Reflect, my dear fellow. The idea is a most acceptable one to Count Muffat."

Muffat at this moment affected an air of ease, and stooped to take from the floor some little thing which he seemed to be examining—it was an egg-cup, the stand of which had been mended with plaster. He held it unconsciously, as he murmured:

"Yes, it would be a very good thing, I think."

Fauchéry turned toward him with a gesture of impatience. The Count had nothing to do with the affairs of the theatre, why did he meddle with them? And the young man said bluntly:

"No; never. Nana as a *cocotte* does very well, but as a lady—a woman of the world, she would be preposterous."

"You are mistaken, I assure you," answered Muffat, emboldened. "She just now vehemently urged me to do my best with—"

"Just now? Why, where is she?" asked Fauchéry, in ever growing astonishment.

"Up-stairs, in one of the dressing-rooms. She can do

it, I assure you. She has an air of admirable distinction, after all! She manages her hands well."

And the Count, still holding the egg-cup, began to imitate Nana, forgetting himself entirely in his efforts to convince his audience.

Fauchéry at last understood. Muffat, who read a certain pity and some contempt in his expression, flushed painfully.

"It is possible that I may be mistaken," murmured the author, obligingly. "She might do it well after all. But the rôle has been given to Rose, and it is impossible to take it from her—"

"Oh! as to that," interrupted Bordenave, "I will undertake to arrange it."

Then the young man, seeing that he had two against him, and that Bordenave had gone over to the enemy, violently broke forth again.

"I tell you, no! If the rôle were unfilled, I would not give it to her. Now, is this clear to you? Let me be! Do you think I want my play killed?"

A long, embarrassed silence ensued. Bordenave, thinking he might be *de trop*, drew back a few steps. The Count's head was bent low. He raised it with an effort, and said in a changed voice:

"Suppose I asked this of you as a favor?"

"It is impossible!" answered Fauchéry, struggling with himself.

Muffat's voice acquired new sharpness.

"I beg of you—I particularly wish it—"

And he looked at the young man earnestly.

Fauchéry, feeling that this gaze was a veiled threat, suddenly yielded and stammered some incoherent words.

"Very well. I consent, but you will see—"

The embarrassment of both men now became very great. Fauchéry was leaning against a dusty packing box, and tapping his foot nervously on the floor. Muffat seemed to be studying the egg-cup with the most absorbed attention.

"It is an egg-cup," said Bordenave, obligingly.

"Yes, an egg-cup," repeated the Count, mechanically.

"Excuse me; you are covered with dust," said the

Manager, taking the cup and placing it on a shelf. "You know, of course, that it is of no use to try and sweep and keep all these things clean. Perhaps you may think this is all trash here, but I assure you that, with few exceptions, everything is very essential to us."

He pointed out the contents of various shelves to Muffat, saying, with a laugh, that he wanted him to be interested in his inventory. Then, as they came back to the spot where Fauchéry was standing, he added, in a light, gay tone:

"As we seem to agree now, we had best terminate this discussion. Ah, here comes Mignon."

Mignon had been in the corridor for some moments, and when Bordenave uttered these words, he burst out, for he understood them instantly. He declared that his wife's prospects would be ruined, if this part were taken from her, and that it was an insult to her, and to him. Bordenave calmly said that the rôle was not worthy of Rose, and that he preferred to keep her back for an operetta, which would be brought out after "La Petite Duchesse." But as the husband was not disposed to submit, he offered to cancel the engagement, and gave him to understand that he knew that the husband and wife had been listening to propositions from the *Folies Dramatiques*.

Then Mignon, discomfited for a moment, but making no denial, pretended to feel the greatest disdain for money. His wife had been engaged to play the "Duchesse Hélène," and she should play it, even if he (Mignon) spent a fortune in upholding her rights. His honor and dignity were both involved. Embarked on these points, the discussion was interminable. The Manager repeated over and over again that when the *Folies* offered three hundred francs a night to Rose, for a hundred representations, and that as he gave her only one hundred and fifty, it was fifteen thousand francs that he allowed her to make, by releasing her.

The husband shrugged his shoulders with the air of a man who rises above all questions of money. What would be said of him, if he stood still, and allowed his wife to be robbed of her rôle? Why, simply that she was not equal to it, and that it was necessary to provide a substitute. This, of course, once said, would injure her reputa-

tion as an artist. No, no. Glory before money. All at once he said what he would do. Rose, by the terms of her engagement, forfeited ten thousand francs, if she broke her engagement. Very well. Let the Manager give her ten thousand francs, and she would go to the *Folies Dramatiques*. Bordenave stood, as if stunned, while Mignon never moved his eyes from the face of the Count, as he calmly waited.

"Then it is all settled," murmured Muffat, with a sigh of relief.

"By no means!" cried Bordenave, all his instincts, as a business man, awakened. "Ten thousand francs to let Rose go! Not I! You know, Mignon, that I am not quite such a fool."

But his elbow was gently touched, and he knew that the Count commanded him to accept these terms. He still hesitated, however, regretting these ten thousand francs, although they were not to come out of his pocket. He finally resumed, roughly:

"After all, I am willing, and glad to get rid of you."

In the meantime Fontan was listening, below the window in the court-yard. Much puzzled, he had hastened down there to establish himself at that post. When he grasped the full meaning of this assembled conclave, he rushed up-stairs to inform Rose, and was delighted to find that he put her into quite as great a rage as he had anticipated.

She instantly flew to the room, where the conspirators still lingered. They were dumb when they saw her. She looked at the four men, one after the other. Muffat turned away; Fauchéry answered with a despairing shrug of his shoulders to the questioning in her eyes. As to Bordenave and Mignon, they were discussing the form of the release.

"What is going on here?" she asked, abruptly.

"Nothing," answered her husband; "only Bordenave wants to give me ten thousand francs for your rôle."

She trembled and turned very pale, as she clenched her little fists. She turned full upon him in this sudden revolt of her whole nature—she who had hitherto been so submissive in all matters of business, allowing him, as she always

did, to sign her engagements with her theatrical managers, and also with her friends.

She uttered one quick, short exclamation, and then words that cut him like a whip-lash:

"You are a mean scoundrel!"

She rushed away, Mignon, after a moment's silent consternation, following her. Was she mad? He explained to her, in a low voice, that ten thousand francs from one manager, and fifteen thousand from another, made in all twenty-five thousand, and it was a splendid stroke of business. Besides, it was a great thing to have plucked this feather from Muffat's wing.

But Rose made no answer, and Mignon left her indignantly, telling her to sulk it out.

He said to Bordenave, as he came on the stage with Fauchéry and Muffat,

"We will sign the contract to-morrow. Have the money ready."

Presently, Nana, being summoned by Labordette, appeared, smiling and triumphant. She adopted an air of great dignity and reserve, to prove to these idiots that she could be well-bred and stylish when she pleased. But she came very near compromising this dignity. Rose, as soon as she saw her, rushed forward and said, in a hissing whisper,

"I will soon settle with you—remember that!"

Nana, forgetting herself, was about to place her hands on her hips, and pour forth the choicest specimens of her vocabulary. But she restrained herself, and exaggerating the flute-like sweetness of her voice, made a little gesture like a high-bred Marquise who had unwittingly trodden on a bit of orange-peel:

"Ah! What! I think you must be a little mad, my dear."

Then she continued to display all her new airs and graces, while Rose rushed away, followed by Mignon. Clarisse obtained from Bordenave the rôle of Augusta, and was charmed at her success. Fauchéry kept a little aloof, and wore a most gloomy brow, but he could not make up his mind to leave the theatre. He felt that his play was ruined. But Nana went up to him and seized him by

both hands, asking him if he really thought her so utterly atrocious. She would not hurt his play. Finally, she elicited a reluctant smile from him, and compelled him to admit that it would be very silly for him to quarrel with her in his position toward the Muffats. If her memory failed her, she said, she would pay all the greater attention to the prompter, and he would realize that he had misjudged her when he saw how she filled the theatre. Then it was agreed between them that Fauchéry should make some slight changes in the rôle of the Duchess, so that more should be given to Prullière, who was naturally enchanted.

In all this kindly state of feeling which Nana had contrived to create about her, Fontan alone was neglected. He stood by himself—affecting an easy attitude—as if to say that he was indifferent to all this nonsense. Nana calmly went up to him, and offered her hand.

"You are well?" she said.

"Yes; and you—?"

"Very well. Thanks."

This was all. They had, to all appearance, separated the evening before at the door of the theatre, without other than a feeling of indifference.

In the meantime the actors were still waiting, supposing that the third act was to be repeated; but Bordenave said that they had all had quite enough for that day.

Then Bosc, who was punctual to a degree, went off grumbling: what was the use of making them lose an entire afternoon in this way, he would like to know. Everybody separated, and when they reached the sidewalk winked their eyelids, half-blinded by the broad daylight, like people who have spent three or four hours in a dark cellar.

The Count, faint and dizzy, entered a carriage with Nana, while Labordette walked away with Fauchéry, whom he undertook to comfort.

A month later, the first representation of *La Petite Duchesse* was a great disaster for Nana. She showed herself so atrociously bad, and made so many pretensions, that the public were infinitely amused. She was not hissed, but everybody laughed. Rose Mignon made herself very

conspicuous: she welcomed her rival, whenever she came on the stage, with a shrill laugh, which was followed by the entire house. This was her first vengeance, and when Nana, after the play was over, found herself alone with Muffat, she said, passionately:

"It was a plot—an infamous cabal to injure me. I understand it all. It was the purest jealousy. What do I care what they think of me? I can do without them perfectly well. But you shall yet see that I will bring them down, and they shall bow low before me. I will yet show these Parisians that I have a very clear conception of the rôle of a *grande dame!*"

CHAPTER XV.

A GRANDE DAME.

FROM this time Nana became a *grande dame*, in her acceptation of the term. Her photographs were in every window; her name appeared each day in the newspapers. When she passed in her carriage on the Boulevard or in the Bois, the crowd turned and looked after her with the enthusiasm of people saluting their sovereign; while she, lounging amid her cushions, smiled gayly with her painted lips, her blue eyes half hidden by the light blonde curls on her brow. And the extraordinary thing was, that this big creature—so pretentious and so awkward on the stage—so ridiculous when she undertook to play the part of a *femme du monde*—should be so successful and so natural off of it. She was the aristocrat of folly and set the fashion in all things; and the great ladies imitated her.

Nana's hôtel was on the Avenue de Villiers, in that luxurious Quartier which was then growing up amid the former desolation of the Plaine Monçeau. Built by a young artist in the intoxication of his first success, compelled to sell it almost before the plaster was dry, it was in the Renaissance style, and looked like a palace, with a certain quaintness of arrangement, and an attention to modern convenience and comfort, which was altogether remarkable. Comte Muffat had bought the hôtel as it stood, completely furnished; filled with a host of trifles, of beautiful Eastern hangings, old china and carved chairs of the time of Louis XIII. Nana thus fell into artistic surroundings of really exquisite taste; but as the atelier which occupied the centre of the house was of no use to her, she made many changes, leaving on the *rez de chaussée* two salons and a dining-room, and on the first floor a large boudoir next to her sleeping and dressing-rooms. She astonished the architect by the ideas she gave him, and he wondered at the natural refinement of this *fille*, who had an instinctive intuition of all the

elegancies of life. He saw at once that there was no danger of her spoiling the hôtel; she even added to it some bits of rich furniture which were tasteful, and also some touches of sentiment—the remains of the romances she had dreamed when she, a little flower-maker, had stood looking in at the windows of the shops.

In the court-yard, under the glass piazza, a carpet was spread upon the steps, and as soon as one entered the vestibule the air was heavy and warm, scented with the odor of violets. A large window, set with yellow and rose-colored glass, lighted the broad stairs, at the foot of which stood a negro carved in wood, holding a silver tray heaped high with visiting cards; four marble women, scantily draped, held high their lamps; bronzes and cloisonné enamels were displayed on all sides; flowers were everywhere, and divans covered with old tapestry furnished the hall and were placed on the wide, square landings, making of the second hall an ante-room where men's hats and coats were always to be seen. Thick carpets deadened every footfall, and the stillness was so intense that it was like entering a chapel to cross the threshold.

Nana did not throw open the grand salon, furnished in the richest style of the reign of Louis XVI., except on gala nights, when she received the Tuileries people, or strangers of distinction. Generally speaking, she only came down at stated hours for meals—a little lonely when she breakfasted by herself in the lofty dining-room hung with Gobelin tapestry, with a huge monumental buffet, gay with old faïence and marvellous pieces of old silver. She hurried back, for she lived on the next floor in her three rooms—bed-room, dressing-room, and boudoir. Twice already she had refurnished the chamber,—the first time in mauve satin, the second in lace over blue silk,—and was not yet pleased; she thought the last dull and faded. She was anxious to try something else, but could not make up her mind what it should be.

The low bed was hung and covered with Point de Venise, which must have cost at least twenty thousand francs. The chairs and all the furniture were of blue and white lacquer, inlaid with silver; on the carpets, white bearskins were thrown in such quantities that they almost

made a carpet of themselves—this was a caprice of Nana's, who had a way of sitting on the floor when she was so inclined. The salon, or boudoir on the left, was a most amusing pêle-mêle: there were hangings of pale rose-colored silk—the faded, Turkish rose-color—embroidered with gold, and things from all over the world. Italian cabinets, Spanish and Portuguese boxes, Chinese pagodas, a Japanese parasol of the most exquisite finish; faïence, bronzes, embroideries and tapestry, while the chairs were like sofas and the sofas as capacious as beds—the whole room had the luxurious, sleepy look of a seraglio. Its general tone was old gold, lighted up by touches of deep red. Nothing indicated the *fille* except the exaggerated luxury of the seats and two bisque statuettes—neither of which would have found either favor or toleration at the hands of people who had been properly bred. Through a door that stood open almost all the time, the interior of the dressing-room could be seen, with its marble bath—its silver jars on the dressing-table, and its crystal bottles and ivory brushes. The daylight came softly in through closely-drawn muslin curtains, and the room was heavy with the odor of violets—Nana's especial perfume, and that which filled the whole hôtel.

Nana's greatest trouble was to find the requisite servants for her new house. She had Zoé once more, who was devoted to her, and who had been for several months awaiting this brilliant denouement, and was now taking her ease as real mistress of the establishment, all the time, however, faithfully protecting the interests of her mistress. But a femme de chambre was not all that Madame required. She needed a Maître d'Hôtel, a coachman, a concierge, a cook, and other servants. The stables, too, were not to be neglected. Here Labordette made himself useful, and executed a host of commissions which the Count found too burthensome. He attended to the selection of the horses, went with Nana to look at carriages, and influenced Nana's selection in all the purchases she made. He was to be seen with her everywhere. He even engaged her servants. Charles, the coachman, had been employed by the Duc de Corbreuse. Julien, the Maître d'Hôtel, was a little fellow with a smiling face and curling hair.

Victorine was the cook; her husband the concierge and footman. This man, François, in knee-breeches and powdered hair, wore Nana's livery—blue and silver—and showed in all guests. His air and manner were irreproachable.

Early in the second month the establishment was in good running order—at an expense of three hundred thousand francs. There were eight horses in the stable, and five carriages in the carriage house, one of which, a landau with silver trimmings, was the wonder of Paris for twenty-four hours. And Nana reveled in the midst of all this luxury. She had forsaken the theatre after the third representation of La Petite Duchesse, leaving Bordenave on the brink of failure, in spite of the assistance volunteered by the Count. She bluntly informed him that she no longer cared for the applause of the public or the fame won upon the boards. She, nevertheless, cherished a certain feeling of bitterness against the public that had laughed at her. This experience she added to that gained through Fontan. But she never thought of avenging herself on the comedian; such an idea never entered her light head. She never looked forward a day. All that remained to her of the Past was a more extravagant love of expenditure, a natural contempt for the man who paid, and caprices which became daily more and more extravagant. She seemed to delight in the ruin of her admirers.

Nana, from the first, arranged the programme of her relations with the Count. He was to give her twelve thousand francs monthly, without counting presents, and asked, in return, only the most entire fidelity, which she swore. But she too exacted something. She demanded liberty, full and complete, and unswerving respect for her wishes. It was agreed that Muffat should come only at certain hours; that she should receive her friend whenever she pleased; and, in short, that he should have a blind faith in her. Whenever he kicked against the pricks, and showed any indications of jealousy, she put on an air of offended dignity, threatening to leave him at once, or else she closed his lips with new oaths and promises. She swore always on the head of her little Louis, which certainly should have satisfied him. There was no love,

however; where there was no esteem, love was impossible. In reality, however, she would have eaten dry bread and drank water rather than give up her dear freedom. At the end of her first month, Muffat yielded on all points, and ended by respecting her.

But she wished and obtained more than this. She soon adopted a maternal air, and exercised a strong influence over him for his good. When he appeared in a sulky mood, she cheered him, and gave him advice, after hearing his confession. By degrees she became familiar with all his home annoyances, all those caused him by his wife, by his daughter, and by business affairs. Her counsel was good, characterized by justice and honesty. Once only did she allow herself to be carried away by passionate prejudice, and that was the day when the Count confided to her that Daguenet was unquestionably on the point of asking his daughter Estelle's hand in marriage. Ever since the compact between the Count and Nana, Daguenet had seen fit to treat her as an adventuress who was ruining his future father-in-law. She now left nothing unsaid in regard to her old friend. He was a wretch who had thrown away his fortune most recklessly. He was totally lacking in moral sense; he no longer having money of his own, sponged on others, and paid only occasionally for a dinner or a bouquet; and when the Count found an excuse for this, she told him squarely that Daguenet had once been her friend. Muffat became very pale, and there was no further discussion between them in regard to the young man, and she felt that she had suppressed him, which would teach him, she hoped, a little gratitude in the future.

The Hôtel all this time was not entirely furnished; and one evening, when Nana had lavished on Muffat the most energetic oaths of fidelity, she showed a fondness for Comte Xavier de Vandeuvres. He had showered flowers upon her for the previous fortnight, and had called in the most assiduous fashion. She listened to him to prove to him that she was free to do as she pleased. At first she had no interested motives, and had no idea of money until the following day, when Vandeuvres assisted her to pay a bill of which she did not care to speak to Muffat. Vandeuvres

told her he would make her an allowance of ten thousand francs per month, which sum would be most acceptable as pocket-money: for Labordette, who understood things at a glance, had warned her, that she would never make both ends meet with the twelve thousand francs given her monthly by Muffat. Vandeuvres had just left Lucy Stewart, and was spending the last of his fortune; he had a right to commit a final folly, as he said himself, with his grand air. His horses and Lucy together had devoured three estates. Nana would swallow, at a mouthful, all that remained to him—some property near Amiens. And he seemed eager now to get rid of everything, even the ruins of an old castle, built by a Vandeuvres under Philip Augustus, and to think it a fine thing to leave the last of his gold pieces in the hands of this *fille* who was the wonder of Paris. He, too, accepted Nana's conditions—entire liberty—visited her only at certain hours and on certain days, and was not impassioned or naïf enough to demand oaths in return. Muffat suspected nothing. As to Vandeuvres, he, of course, knew the truth, but he never made the smallest allusion to it, and affected to ignore it with his faint skeptical smile and lifted eyebrows, as if to protest against being supposed to ask for the impossible; he only desired his hour, and that Paris should know it.

Thus was Nana's establishment at last completed, from the stables to the attic. Zoé managed everything with a high hand; all went on like machinery, as regular as possible, for the first few months. Madame, however, made Zoé at times very uncomfortable by her imprudence and obstinacy, and by her foolish bravado.

Finally the femme de chambre consoled herself with the recollection that her profits were greater when her mistress was most foolish. Then presents began to rain down; she fished for gold in the troubled waters.

One morning, while Muffat was still there, and Nana had gone into her dressing-room, Zoé opened the door and showed in a trembling youth.

"Good heavens! Is it Georges?" Nana exclaimed.

It was indeed Georges. He rushed toward her and, clasping her in his arms, kissed her passionately. She struggled silently, and in great terror whispered:

"Let me go! He is there! And, Zoé, are you mad? Take him away. Keep him down-stairs and I will come down."

It was with difficulty that Zoé induced the youth to obey. Finally, when Nana joined them in the dining-room, she scolded them both. Zoé indignantly compressed her lips and retired, saying, sulkily, that she thought she was giving pleasure to Madame. Georges looked at Nana, his handsome eyes full of tears of joy at seeing her again. He said his penance was at last over: his mother had allowed him to leave Fondettes, supposing that he had come to his senses; and he had hurried with all speed to Paris to find his beloved.

As he spoke he held her hands, eager to see her after this cruel year of separation; his hands trembled, and he was excessively agitated. Was it joy, or did he shudder at her influence over him?

"And you really love me?" he whispered, affecting a certain childishness.

"You know I love you," answered Nana, a little impatiently, as she disengaged herself. "But, really, you must not fall from the clouds in this way, without giving me some warning. You know I am not always free, and you must be wiser."

Georges had leaped from his carriage, so carried away by the hope of seeing her again, that he had not paid the smallest attention to her surroundings. He now began to notice them. He glanced up at the gilded ceiling with its rich decorations, its Gobelin tapestry, and the gorgeous display of silver on the side-board.

"Yes," he said, sadly, "yes, I understand."

She then told him that he must never come in the morning. In the afternoon, from four to six, she would be glad to see him as often as he chose to appear. These were her hours for receiving. He looked at her with such supplication in his eyes, that she kissed his forehead, saying, gently:

"Be good, and I will do my best."

The truth was, however, that Nana was no longer in the least interested in him. She thought him a nice little fellow, and liked to have him with her in a spirit of

cameraderie, but that was all. Nevertheless he seemed so utterly wretched at times, when he arrived day after day at four o'clock, that she allowed him to gather hope—to linger near her—and at last he became part of the household, living there like Bijou, the little dog, both lying at her feet, both sharing her smiles when she was dull and otherwise alone.

Madame Hujon speedily learned that this wicked woman had Georges again within her clutches, and at once hurried to Paris to ask the assistance of her elder son, Captain Philippe, then stationed at Vincennes, from whom Georges was carefully concealing himself, for he stood in wholesome fear of this elder brother. And as he could not keep anything to himself, he had a great deal to say to Nana about this Philippe, who would not hesitate to take any measures, however severe.

"You understand," he said, "my mother will not come here, but she can send my brother. I am perfectly sure she will send him to look for me."

For the first time Nana was really wounded.

"I should like to see him come!" she cried, hotly "Captain or no captain, François will show him the door about the quickest!"

The boy, in spite of her indignation, insisted on talking about this brother, so that, at the expiration of a week, she knew every particular in regard to this unseen captain. She knew he was tall and large, that he was gay and even a little rough, she knew that he had a mole on his left hand, and a scar on his arm. And one day she cried out to Georges:

"Why doesn't your brother come? He must be a coward!"

The very next morning, when Georges was alone with Nana, François came up to ask if Madame would receive Captain Philippe Hujon.

Georges turned pale, and murmured:

"I knew it; my mother spoke of it this morning."

And he implored Nana to say that she was not at home, but she rose indignantly, with flashing eyes.

"Why?" she exclaimed. "Why should I say I am not in? Do you think I am afraid to see him? François, show

this gentleman into the salon. He may wait there a good half-hour, and then you, Georges, shall bring him to me."

She began to walk up and down the room, with a bright color in her cheeks, going from the mantle mirror to another at the end of the room, a Venetian mirror suspended above a Lombardy cabinet. Each time she glanced at herself with a smile, and pulled out the light meshes of her hair, while Georges shuddered at the horrible scene which he felt to be in preparation. As she walked she dropped disconnected phrases.

"It will do this fellow good to wait a little while, and then, if he thinks he has called on a common person, he will have time to find out his mistake. Examine everything, my good fellow, and perhaps you will learn to feel some respect for me. No, I won't send for him yet; he has not waited ten minutes."

She could not sit still, nor could Georges; he was pitiably uneasy. She said he must go out, but he must not listen at the door, for it would be awkward if the servants should see him.

As the boy withdrew he said, in a choked voice:

"You know, he is my brother."

"Don't be troubled," she answered with dignity. "If he is polite, I shall be the same."

François threw the door open, and Philippe Hujon entered. The young officer wore a civilian's dress. Georges, at first, had every intention of obeying Nana, going down to the dining-room, there to await the result of the interview. But the sound of their voices glued his feet to the floor. He imagined all sorts of catastrophes—slapped faces and indignities which would forever throw a barrier between himself and Naña. At last he could no longer refrain from placing his ear at the key-hole, but he heard very little; the doors were too thick for that. He caught, however, an occasional word, uttered by Philippe—"family," "honor," "a mere child." In his eagerness to catch Nana's response, his heart began to beat so quickly that there was only a confused, buzzing sound in his ears.

Would she call him "a fool," or would she bid him hold his tongue? No, all was silent; not a sound from Nana. Then came Philippe's voice, softened to a mur-

mur. Georges was lost in astonishment, when a strange sound completed his stupefaction. Could it be that Nana was sobbing? For a moment he hesitated as to what he should do. Should he rush in and cry out "Philippe!" and tell his brother that he was a coward to make a woman cry in this way? But at this moment Zoé appeared, and he hastily went away from the door, ashamed of being caught listening. The femme de chambre calmly began to arrange the linen in a wardrobe, while the boy stood, with his brow against the window, looking out with eyes that saw nothing. She asked in a moment or two:

"Is that your brother in there with Madame?"

"Yes," answered the boy, in a choked voice.

"And you are troubled about it?"

"Yes," said the youth, in the same reluctant way.

Zoé did not urge him. She was slowly counting and arranging a pile of napkins. Finally she said:

"All will come right; Madame will arrange it."

This was all. They said not another word. She did not leave the room, but continued to busy herself in one way or another, and pretended not to notice the intense nervousness of the young man, who was growing paler and paler with suspense and doubt. His eyes were riveted on the door. Why did his brother stay so long? Could Nana be still weeping? When Zoé at last left the room, he ran again to the door, gluing his ear to the crack once more, and he was confounded to catch a laugh and a gay word, a tender intonation. Then Nana, almost immediately, went with Philippe to the head of the stairs, and there exchanged with him cordial, friendly words.

When the boy at last ventured to enter the salon, Nana stood before a mirror, looking at herself intently.

"Well?" he said.

"Well—what?" she repeated, without turning around. Then she added, carelessly:

"What did you mean by what you said? Your brother is very nice."

"Then it is all settled?"

"Of course it— Did you suppose we were coming to blows?"

Still Georges did not understand. He stammered out a few words:

"But I thought I heard— Were you not crying?"

"Crying! I crying!" she exclaimed, whirling about and looking at him. "Are you dreaming? Why should I have cried?"

He began to tremble now, for he feared that she would make a scene because of his disobeying her and listening. But he escaped with the assistance of a falsehood, pretending that as Zoé was in the room he ventured to remain there.

She turned away pouting, and he said in a coaxing voice:

"Then, my brother—"

"Your brother, my child, at once understood who and what I was. You see I might have been an ordinary *fille*, and then his interference would have been advisable, because of your youth. I understand this, of course. But at a glance he saw his mistake, and behaved as a man of the world should do. But now you need not be troubled. He will tranquillize your mother, and you will be free."

She continued, with a laugh:

"Besides, you will see your brother here now. I have invited him, and he will come."

"Ah," repeated the poor little fellow, whitening to his very lips, "he will come."

He said no more, and there was no further talk of Philippe. He watched her with sad eyes as she dressed to go out. He was, of course, glad that things were thus easily settled, for he would have preferred death to separation. But way down in the depths of his heart, there was a dull ache, which he did not himself understand, and of which he spoke to no one.

He never knew how Philippe tranquillized their mother, who, three days later, went back to Fondettes, apparently quite at her ease, cautioning Georges to follow Philippe's advice most closely. That evening, when the youth was, as usual, with Nana at five o'clock, he started when he saw his brother enter. But the Captain was gay and cordial, treating him like a schoolboy who had been guilty of some

escapade which was not serious in its consequences. Georges was greatly troubled and did not venture to move—coloring like a young girl at each word he tried to speak. He had never been intimate with Philippe, who was his elder by fifteen years. He felt a bitter sense of indignation in seeing him so entirely at his ease in Nana's society, laughing and talking as he pleased, radiant with good health and good humor. As Philippe, however, fell into a way of dropping in, regularly, every day that he could escape from Vincennes, Georges became gradually accustomed to seeing him.

Nana, at this period of her career, had not a wish ungratified.

One afternoon, when Philippe, as well as Georges, was with her, the Count, setting at defiance the regulations she had prescribed, appeared with a box for a first representation which was to take place the next night. But when Zoé said that Madame had friends with her, he went away, not caring to come in; entrusting the coupons to the femme de chambre. In his blind confidence, he affected the discretion of a man of gallantry, and an absolute respect for treaties.

When he returned in the evening, Nana received him with the indignant coldness of an insulted woman.

"Monsieur," she said, "I have never given you any reason to insult me. I am always visible, do you understand; and when I am at home, I beg that you will come in like the rest of the world."

The Count was dumbfounded.

"But my dear—" he began.

"You did not come in because I had visitors," she answered, interrupting him almost rudely. "And they were masculine visitors, too. And pray, what did you think I was doing with these men? You are deficient in tact, sir, and I do not care to be *affiched* in this way!"

He obtained his pardon, with infinite difficulty. In reality he was delighted. It was by dint of similar scenes that she kept him submissive and confident. She had induced him to show a certain kindness to Georges, saying he was a mere child and amused her. She wanted him to meet Philippe, whom he knew elsewhere. The Captain

and the Count dined, one day, at her table, and the latter was courteous, and, taking the younger man apart, asked him for news of his most excellent mother: he carefully obeyed Nana and never appeared to be under her roof on any different footing than any other of her guests, which saved him an infinite deal of embarrassment as a husband, and an official personage on the Tuesdays in the Rue de Merosmesnil, where he met many of Nana's guests.

From this time, the Hujon brothers, Vandeuvres, and Muffat met constantly, and shook hands with each other as friends of the household. It was much more convenient, too, and that evening, when Nana was crouching on one of the white bearskins, Muffat spoke most amiably of these gentlemen, and more especially of Philippe, who was all loyalty and honor, he said.

"Yes; they are very nice—" murmured Nana, "very nice indeed. You see they know just what I am,—that I am faithful to you. If they should utter one word, I should show them the door."

Meanwhile—amid all this luxury, and surrounded as she was by her little court—Nana began to be frightfully bored. In vain did men crowd around her at all hours of the day; in vain did she see gold pieces scattered on her dressing-table and in her drawers, among her combs and brushes: she was not content. She felt that there was a blank somewhere—a terrible sense of emptiness. Her life dragged itself along from morning until evening—dull and unoccupied; each week a repetition of the previous one. She attached no meaning to the word "to-morrow," and was utterly indifferent to the future; she lived like a bird, sure of finding something to eat and ready to sleep on the first branch that offered itself. The certainty that she would be fed and cared for, allowed her to lounge through the entire day in the silence and submission of this conventional seclusion—the seclusion of a *fille* who was respected by the police. She nearly lost the use of her limbs, for she never went out except in her carriage. She went back to the childish pursuits of her youth, kissing Bijou for hours at a time, killing the days and the nights as best she could; submitting with an air of ennui to the visits of her several friends. She had but one care, and that was the preserva-

tion of her beauty; her baths and her perfumes were her one great pleasure.

Nana rose about ten o'clock in the morning. Bijou, the little Scotch terrier that slept on the foot of the bed, awoke her by licking her face, and the dog and his mistress then had a frolic of some ten minutes in duration. Bijou often aroused the jealousy of the Count, who frequently put the little creature out of the room. Nana on leaving her bed entered her dressing-room, where she took a bath. About eleven, Francis came to put up her hair, although the complicated coiffure for the evening was not accomplished until later. At breakfast, as she could not endure to be alone, she had with her almost always Madame Maloir, who, caring little for the elegancies of this hôtel, resumed all her old habits, dropping in early in the day with the same marvellous bonnets as of yore. No one knew whence she came, or where she went when she left in the evening. The hours of the day which Nana found most difficult to kill, were the two or three between breakfast and the toilette. She sometimes played besique with her old friend, or read *Figaro*, whose accounts of the theatres and stories of crime interested her. She occasionally opened a book, for she piqued herself on her literary acquirements. She thought of having a library, which she intended to fill with moral and sentimental romances. Her toilette occupied her until five o'clock; then she awoke from her apathy, and went out in her carriage or received at home, from five to six, a crowd of men, who brought her more or less huge bouquets. She often dined at a restaurant and retired very late, to rise the next day and go through with the same routine.

Her great distraction was to go to Batignolles to see her little Louis at his aunt's. For a fortnight she would forget him, and then all at once, in a frenzy of maternal affection, she would hurry to him on foot, carrying with her the gifts she might have taken to a hospital—tobacco for the aunt, or oranges and biscuit for the child; or she would go there in her carriage on her way from the Bois, with a rattle of wheels and a toilette that set the whole street astir. Ever since her niece had reached her present height of grandeur, Madame Lerat had affected to hold herself a little aloof;

she almost never went to Nana's hôtel, saying that it was not the place for her; but she was radiant with triumph when Nana came, in her conspicuous way, to call upon her, wearing dresses that cost some ten thousand francs, and was happy all the next day in showing the gifts she had received, and mentioning sums of money which stupefied all her neighbors. As a general thing, Nana devoted her Sundays to her family; and on those days, if Muffat or any one else invited her anywhere, she declined, with the smile of a good, simple, little mother.

"No, indeed!" she said; "she must dine with her aunt and her child—she must see her baby!" Besides, poor little Louis was always ill. He was nearly three years old, but puny and delicate. He had suffered from eczema, and now his hearing was affected from abscesses in his ears, and she was afraid the bones of the skull might be injured. When she saw him so pale, with his soft skin spotted with yellow, she often became very serious, and with this seriousness was always a little surprise. What could be the matter with the poor little thing, when she, his mother, was in such perfect health?

In those days when her child did not occupy her, Nana relapsed into the noisy monotony of her life—drives in the Bois; opening nights and first representations; dinners and suppers at the Maison d'Or or the Café Anglais—at all the places, in short, where the crowd gathered; at the Mabille, the Reviews, and at the Races. As soon as she was alone she stretched out her arms with an expression of intense fatigue. Solitude saddened her at once, for she could not endure her own emptiness and ennui. She was always gay, and pretended to be more so than she was in reality, whenever people were about her; but between two yawns she would say to herself:

"Oh, how wearisome these men are!"

One afternoon as she came back from a concert in her landau, Nana noticed a woman on the sidewalk of La Rue Montmartre. Her skirts were draggled, her boots ragged, and her hat ruined by the weather. All at once she recognized her.

"Stop, Charles!" she cried to the coachman, and then leaning from her carriage she called:

"Satin! Satin!"

The passers-by turned to look. Satin went up to the carriage, the muddy wheels of which soiled her skirts still more.

"Get in, my dear," said Nana, quietly, indifferent to the observation of the lookers-on.

And she took the girl, with all her dirt, into her landau, placing her upon the light-blue satin cushions, by the side of her violet silk and its rich Chantilly trimmings, while the spectators smiled at the shocked expression of the coachman.

From this day Nana had an occupation. Satin absorbed her. The girl remained under her roof for three days, and told her benefactress all about Saint Lazare and her troubles with the sisters, and with those beastly policemen, who had put her *en carte*. Nana consoled her and swore she should not be compelled to endure such things again; that she would see to it herself, and even interview the Ministers if it were necessary. But there was no hurry about it, no one would come there for her, that was quite certain. And the two women caressed and kissed each other. But, on the morning of the fourth day, Satin disappeared. No one had seen her go; but she had fled, nevertheless, wearing her new dress, and apparently homesick for her old quarters again.

On this day there was such a tempest in the hotel that all the servants bent their heads before the blast and dared not say one word. Nana was angry with François because he had not been at his post, and had failed to notice Satin's departure. She tried to contain herself, however, and spoke of Satin as a little wretch, said she might have known what the result would be when she picked up such a creature in the street. In the afternoon, when Madame was in her chamber, with the door locked, Zoé heard her sobbing. Suddenly, at night-fall, although she had people to dinner —Georges, Philippe, Vandeuvres, and others—she ordered her carriage to be brought around. These gentlemen could eat their dinner without her, she said. Her child was ill and she was going at once to her aunt's.

She ordered her coachman to drive to Laure's. She had taken it into her head that she would find Satin at the

table d'hôte of La Rue des Martyrs. She did not want to take her away, but she fully intended to slap the girl's face.

She found Satin dining at a small table with Madame Robert; when she beheld Nana she began to laugh. Nana struck to the heart at this, made no scene, but was, on the contrary, quite amiable and gentle. She paid for champagne enough to intoxicate the women at five or six tables, and when Madame Robert's back was turned, carried off Satin. In the carriage she bit her between her kisses, and swore she would kill her if she ran away again.

Twenty times after this did Nana go in pursuit of this creature, who escaped whenever she could from the order and comfort of the hôtel. Nana was quite tragic in her fury as a deceived woman. She vowed she would slap Madame Robert's face; one day she even went so far as to declare she would challenge that person and fight a duel, as there was one too many in this world. Whenever she went to Laure's now, she wore all her diamonds, and often took with her Louise Violaine, Maria Blond, or Tatan Néné, all equally resplendent, and in the greasy atmosphere of these rooms, these women displayed their luxury merely to dazzle the *filles* of the Quartier, who could not eat their dinners, so great was their envy. On these days Laure was more unctuous and suave than ever, and kissed everybody most maternally.

Satin all this time was calm and serene, her clear blue eyes and fair oval face looking quite demure. She stood between these two women, beaten by one, bitten by the other, and only said that it was really very odd, she could not see why they quarrelled. She wished she could make two of herself, but it was impossible. It was Nana who finally carried her away, overwhelming her with tender words and gifts. In revenge Madame Robert wrote vile, anonymous letters to the friends of her rival.

Comte Muffat had looked anxious and careworn for some time. One morning, in great agitation, no longer able to restrain the expression of a doubt that haunted him, he laid before Nana an anonymous letter, which accused her, in plain, unvarnished terms, of deceiving the Count for Vandeuvres and the two Hujons.

"It is false! It is false!" she cried, energetically, and in a tone of great sincerity.

"You swear it?" asked Muffat, already relieved.

"Yes, I swear it on anything you please; on my child's head if you say so."

But the letter was a long one. When Nana had concluded its perusal, she smiled.

"I know whence this comes," she said quietly.

And when Muffat asked her several questions, hoping for a denial, she continued, quite undisturbed:

"But what is it to you, my friend, if I have Satin here? As to Vandeuvres and the Hujons, it is a vastly different matter. You would have a right to complain if these accusations in regard to them were true. Then you might be tempted to strangle me."

The scene continued. Muffat was indignant, and Nana cut him short by saying rudely:

"If my conduct does not suit you, all you have to do is to leave me, the doors stand wide open enough. You must take me as I am, that is all that can be said about it."

Muffat bowed his head. This was his first dastardly act. In the bottom of his heart he was only too thankful to hear this woman swear that she was true to him. From this day Nana took no further trouble to manage him. She had tested her power, and found that she could do much as she pleased. She installed Satin openly in the house. Vandeuvres had no need of anonymous letters to tell him the truth. He tried to awaken Nana's jealousy of Satin, and found infinite amusement in doing so, while Philippe and Georges treated her as a comrade, making little jokes that were naturally quite amicable.

Nana had an adventure one evening, when Satin having deserted her, she went to dine alone in La Rue des Martyrs. As she sat in solitary state, Daguenet appeared. Although he was now *rangé*, he often came there, hoping that he would not be met by any one who would repeat the fact. As soon as he saw Nana he shrugged his shoulders in dismay; but he was not the man to beat a retreat. Advancing with a smile, he asked if Madame would

permit him to dine at her table. Nana drew herself up and answered, coldly:

"You can sit where you choose, sir; we are in a public place."

The conversation was naturally a little constrained after this beginning; but when dessert was brought on, Nana, eager to triumph, leaned forward, with her elbows on the table.

"Well!" she said, with some disdain in her voice; "what progress is your marriage making?"

Daguenet was compelled to answer that, for the present, his matrimonial projects were at a stand-still; the truth was that when about to lay his demand before the Muffats, the Count's manner became so icy that he had prudently abstained.

Nana fixed her clear eyes upon him, her chin resting on her hand and an ironical smile upon her lips.

"Ah! I am an adventuress, am I?" she began, slowly; "and it was necessary to tear the future father-in-law from my claws? I must say that, for a fellow who has seen anything of the world, you are astonishingly stupid! The idea of talking in that way to a man who adores me, and who told me every word you said! Listen, my dear: you could marry to-morrow, if I wished it."

He began to realize this and, while sitting at this table, evolved in his mind a dim project of submission. There might be time yet for him to repair his folly. He did not allow her to see this, but treated the whole thing as a jest. As he drew on his gloves he asked Nana, in the most ceremonious terms, for the hand of Mademoiselle Estelle de Béville. Nana laughed, greatly pleased, and told him that it was impossible to keep angry long with him. The great success that Daguenet had gained with women was due greatly to the quality of his voice—a voice whose purity and sweetness had won for him among the *filles* the title of *Bouche de Velours*. He was well aware of this power, and lulled Nana's wrath to rest by a flood of musical words; and when they at last left the table she was smiling and happy. At the door she dismissed her carriage, and walked to Daguenet's rooms as naturally as possible. Two hours later she said:

"Then you are really thinking of this marriage?"

"Yes," he answered, "unless I can do better. You know my money is all gone."

She called him to hand her her hat, and after a brief silence she added:

"She is only a sack of bones! but still, if it is a good speculation, I am ready to help you; for I was always, as you know, a most obliging person."

He came up to her and pressed her hand as a token of his gratitude. She laughed gayly.

"But what will you give me for my commission? Ah! I know; you will make me a present of your kind regards, and will come to me for advice whenever you get into trouble at home."

He laughingly agreed, and the two seemed to think this bargain an excellent joke. Daguenet did not place her in a fiacre to return home for another hour. The next day he dined with her; the usual Thursday guests—Vandeuvres, Muffat, the Hujons and Satin. The Count arrived early; he was in need of twenty-four thousand francs to relieve Nana from two or three creditors, and to give her a set of sapphires for which she was dying. As his property was already sadly embarrassed, he wanted to borrow the money, not daring to sell any more of his land. Following Nana's advice, he had addressed himself to Labordette; but he was not disposed to undertake the matter, and had sent him to François, who often obliged his customers in a similar way. If the Count accepted the intervention of these gentlemen, it was agreed that his name should not appear in the transaction, they promising, after procuring the money for him, not to put in circulation the note for one hundred thousand francs which he should sign; and they told him that the miserable usurers would swallow up twenty thousand francs.

When Muffat was announced, François was at that moment finishing Nana's hair. Labordette was also in the dressing-room, admitted on the footing of a confidential friend. When he saw the Count, he discreetly laid a large bundle of bank-notes on the corner of the cover of the bath-tub, and the note was signed on the toilette-table.

Nana begged Labordette to stay and dine, but he refused. There was a rich stranger, he said, to whom he

was showing the sights of Paris. Muffat drew him aside and begged him to run to Becker's, the jeweller's, and to bring back the set of sapphires with which he wished to surprise Nana that same evening. Labordette willingly accepted the commission, and in less than half-an-hour he handed the case to the Count, with much mystery.

Nana was nervous that day at dinner. The sight of all that money had disturbed her. To think that eighty thousand francs must slip through her fingers into the hands of these greedy trades-people! It was simply disgusting.

She celebrated the pleasures of poverty from the time the soup was placed on the table. The men were in full dress. She herself wore a robe of white embroidered satin, while Satin was more simply dressed in black silk; on her neck glittered a gold heart, the gift of her kind friend. And behind the guests stood Julien and François, assisted by Zoé, all three very dignified in their deportment.

"I am quite sure that life was far more amusing to me," said Nana, "when I had not a sou in the world."

She had placed Muffat at her right and Vandeuvres at her left, but she took no notice of them. She had eyes only for Satin, who sat opposite, between Philippe and Georges.

"Did not we have good times together then, my dear? And how heartily we two laughed at Mother Josse's school, in La Rue Polonçeau!"

The two women abandoned themselves to their souvenirs. They occasionally felt this temptation, and enjoyed rolling in the mud of their youth; and it was always in the presence of men—their intimates—that they insisted on recalling the locality which had given them birth. These gentlemen looked pale and uncomfortable. Philippe and Georges tried to laugh, while Vandeuvres gnawed his moustache nervously, and Muffat grew very grave.

"Do you remember Victor?" cried Nana. "He was a wicked boy, and liked nothing so much as to frighten everybody with his capers."

"Oh, yes, I remember," answered Satin. "I remember that great court-yard belonging to your house. There was a concierge who always had a broom in her hand—"

"Mother Boche, you mean. She is dead."

"And I can see your shop now. Your mother was enormously stout. One evening when I was playing with you, your father came in tipsy—"

Vandeuvres here attempted a diversion. He interrupted these agreeable souvenirs.

"Pray tell me where these truffles came from," he said. "They are really exquisite. I ate some yesterday at the Duc de Corbreuses, which were not to be compared with these."

"Julien, what are you thinking about?" said Nana, crossly, turning toward her servant. "Why don't you pass the truffles?"

She then continued:

"As to papa, he was never reasonable. He was always more or less drunk, and at the last the veriest rag-picker was better clothed, lodged and fed than we were."

This time Muffat, who was playing with his knife and fork, permitted himself to interfere:

"What you are telling us is not enlivening."

"Not enlivening?" she repeated, quelling him with a look. "I should say not, indeed. We were at starvation's door. I am a truthful woman, and I tell things as they are. Mamma was a laundress; my father was a drunkard, and died of it. If that does not suit you; if you are ashamed of my family—"

Here they interrupted her with protestations. What did she mean? They had the highest respect for her family. But she continued:

"If you are ashamed of them, I say, you can leave me, because I am not one of those women who deny either father or mother. You must respect them with me, you understand."

They took papa and mamma, all the Past—whatever she wished, in short. With their eyes cast down, the four men listened in silence, while she trampled them down with her slip-shod shoes, reeking with the mud of La Rue de La Goutte d'Or. She concluded by saying that she would never again be as much amused as in those days. It was very nice to have a fortune and live in a palace, but she should always regret the day when she munched apples

After all, money was a silly thing, and only intended for trades-people. And her excitement ended by an assertion that she preferred a simple life and to be indulgent and charitable to her neighbors.

At this moment she caught a glimpse of Julien standing idle.

"Well!" she exclaimed, "why don't you pour out the champagne? Why do you stand staring at me in that way?"

During this scene the servants had not once smiled. They did not seem to hear. Their dignity, in fact, increased as their mistress lost hers.

Julien composedly began to fill the glasses with champagne.

Unfortunately, François, in lifting the compotier, tipped it too much, and the pears, grapes and apples rolled upon the floor.

"Stupid creature!" cried Nana.

François attempted to explain by saying that Zoé had shaken them when she took out the oranges.

"Then Zoé is a fool," said Nana.

"But, Madame—" murmured the femme de chambre, deeply wounded.

Suddenly Madame half rose, and with a gesture of regal authority waved her hand:

"Enough! Leave the room, all of you! We do not require your services—"

After this she was much calmer, and became quite amiable, and even gentle. The dessert was charming, and the gentlemen waited upon themselves. Count Muffat was very serious still, however, and preserved his official gravity. But Satin, who had peeled a pear, had gone round behind Nana to eat it, leaning on her shoulder and whispering things in her ear at which they both laughed immoderately. When the girl held the last bit of the pear she insisted on Nana taking half from between her teeth; and playing in this way they forgot where they were, and ended in kissing each other.

This elicited a vehement protest from the gentlemen. Philippe cried out to them that this was too much. Van-

deuvres asked if he should retire, and Georges came and took Satin by the arm and led her back to her seat.

"How silly you all are!" said Nana, coloring deeply. "Just see how you have made the poor child blush. You need not mind them, my dear. It is our own affair."

And, turning toward Muffat, whose gravity was unabated, she said:

"Is not that so, my friend?"

"Yes, certainly," he murmured, with a slow motion of his head.

He did not offer a protest, while, amid all these men, bearing some of the best names of France, these two women exchanged a look of tenderness, and contempt for mankind.

They went up-stairs to the small salon for their coffee. Two lamps shed a soft light upon the rose-colored hangings, and on the lacquer and old gold, the bronzes, and the faïence. The fire was dying on the hearth, but the room was excessively warm, shut in as it was by curtains and portières. Scattered about were evidences of Nana's constant life there: a handkerchief on the sofa, an open book, gloves thrown carelessly on the table. The odor of violets was almost oppressive, and the luxurious sofas and chairs invited the guests to drop off in brief naps in the shelter of some dark corner.

Satin took her seat on a sofa by the fire, and lighted her cigarette. But Vandeuvres began his habitual system of teazing,—declared he was so jealous that he should send his second to wait upon her. Philippe and Georges joined him in his attack upon the girl, who finally cried out:

"Chérie! call them away, will you? They are insupportable!"

"Please let her alone," said Nana, seriously. "I do not choose that she shall be tormented—you know that perfectly well. And as for you, my child, why don't you leave them if they persist in their annoyances?"

Satin, with heightened color, went off into the dressing-room, the door of which stood open—the marbles catching the light from the gas above, that came softly through ground glass globes.

Then, Nana sat and conversed with the four men, a

hostess charming and full of tact. She had read that day a novel which was making a great sensation—the history of a *fille*. She was indignant at the book, which purported to be drawn from nature. A book, in her opinion, should be written in order that its readers should pass an agreeable hour. In the matter of romances and dramas Nana had most decided opinions. She wanted them tender and elevated. She wished them to awaken better thoughts and noble aspirations. Then the conversation turned on the condition of Paris at that precise moment, and touched on the incendiary articles then appearing in the papers, and upon the disturbed condition of Paris, where, each night, at the public meetings, constant threats of an appeal to arms were made. What did these mean wretches want? Why could they not be happy? Had not the Emperor done everything for the people? A nice set they were; she knew them well and could speak with authority, and—forgetting the respect with which she had just before insisted that her family should be treated—she spoke of them now and of the little world in La Rue de la Goutte d'Or, with great disgust and contempt. That same afternoon she had read in the *Figaro* the account of a public meeting at which she laughed still, because of the argot with which it was peppered, and of a drunken man who was expelled.

"I loathe these tipsy creatures," she said, with an air of repugnance. "Can't you see that a Republic in France would be a misfortune for the whole world? Ah! may God preserve our Emperor to us as long as possible!"

"God will grant your prayer, my dear," answered Muffat, gravely. "But you need be under no concern—the Emperor's throne is solid."

The Count liked to hear her utter these excellent sentiments, and always encouraged her in her Imperialist religion.

Vandeuvres and Captain Hujon indulged in many pleasantries against "the voyons," as they styled the brawlers who fled from the camp as soon as they perceived a bayonet. Georges that evening, however, was pale and silent.

"What has gone wrong, simpleton?" asked Nana, at last, noticing his discomfort.

"Nothing," he murmured. "I am only listening."

But he was evidently suffering. When they left the table he had seen Philippe take Nana's two hands in his; and now, it was still Philippe who was near her. His heart was sore, but he did not know precisely why. Of course there was nothing between Nana and Philippe—it was impossible—the world would have crumbled under their feet in that case; he was ashamed of the thoughts that came to him whenever he saw them together. He knew what Nana was; he knew her past relations with Steiner, with Muffat and all the others, but he turned sick at the thought that Philippe might ever admire her.

"Here! take Bijou," she said, to console him, handing over to him the little dog asleep in her lap.

And Georges began to revive at the touch of this animal still drowsy and sluggish.

The conversation then turned upon a considerable loss which Vandeuvres had suffered the evening before at the Cercle Impérial. Muffat never played, and was much astonished. But Vandeuvres smiled, and said that the kind of death mattered little, the only thing was to die well. He insisted on speaking of his ruin, of which all the world had begun to talk. Nana had seen for some time that he was nervous, with new lines at the corners of his mouth, and a strange, uncertain gleam in his eyes. He was still elegant, however, and preserved his aristocratic hauteur, and it was only occasionally that he showed any disturbance or anxiety. One night he said to Nana that he would go to his stables and set fire to them when everything else had gone, and his horses and himself should perish in the flames. His only hope now was in his horse Lusignan, which he had in training for the Prix de Paris. Having devoured his last farm and his last forest, he pinned all his faith on this horse, and promised Nana a large sum of money in June if Lusignan won.

"Pshaw!" she replied, laughingly, "what will you do if he loses the race?"

He contented himself with giving her his faint, mysterious smile; then he said, carelessly:

"By the way, I took the liberty of giving your name to my outsider, a colt, 'Nana;' that sounds well, I think. You are not angry, I trust?"

"Angry; and why?" she answered, in reality greatly pleased.

Nana and her guests continued to chat, and spoke of the approaching execution, to which the hostess wished to go. At this moment Satin appeared at the door of the dressing-room and called her to come in the most beseeching tones. Nana rose at once, leaving the gentlemen, luxuriously ensconced in their arm-chairs, finishing their cigars and discussing a grave question of criminality—the amount of responsibility attached to a murderer who was an habitual drunkard. In the dressing-room she found Zoé tumbled on to a chair, weeping hot tears, while Satin vainly attempted to console her.

"What on earth is the matter?" asked Nana, in great surprise.

"Oh! chérie, speak to her," said Satin. "For twenty minutes I have been trying to make her hear reason. She is crying because you called her names at dinner."

"Yes, Madame—it is too hard—too hard!" sobbed the femme de chambre, going off in a new series of strangling sobs.

This spectacle quite touched Nana. She spoke kindly to Zoé, who paid no heed to her words; and then leaning over her, took her by the hand with affectionate familiarity.

"But, simpleton; I didn't mean it. I was angry, and I was in the wrong. So, please, think no more about it!"

"And, to think how I have loved Madame!" stammered Zoe. "After all I have done for Madame!"

Nana kissed Zoé. Then, desirous of showing her that she was not angry, she made her a present of a dress that she had worn only three times. Their quarrels always terminated in this way, and Zoé wiped her eyes with her handkerchief, and, taking the dress over her arm, she said that it was still very sad in the kitchen; that Julien and François had not been able to eat a mouthful since their feelings had been so hurt by Madame. And Nana sent them down a louis as an evidence of reconciliation. She did not like to see people suffer—it pained her too deeply.

But, as Nana was about to return to the salon, delighted

to have arranged this affair so successfully, Satin put her arm around her and began to talk earnestly. She declared that she would go away if these men were allowed to tease her in this way, and insisted that they should all be sent away at once: it would give them a lesson, and they two would be so happy alone together.

Nana was in despair, and told her this could not be. Then the girl went on like a spoiled child, with her "shalls" and "wills."

"You shall send them away now—this very moment!" she declared, stamping her foot. "If you don't, I shall go myself."

And she went back to the salon, where she extended herself upon a sofa, a little apart, near the window, and lying there silent and as if dead, fixed her great eyes on Nana, and waited.

These gentlemen gave their conclusions adverse to the new criminal theories; with this beautiful invention of irresponsibility in certain pathological cases, there are no more criminals—there are only sick men. Nana nodded approval, all the time wondering how she was to get rid of the Count. The others were now going, but he showed no intention of moving.

When Philippe rose to retire, Georges decided to follow; he was never willing to go and leave his brother behind him. Vandeuvres remained a little longer: he lingered to ascertain if, perchance, Muffat would not leave the field to him; but, seeing there was no indication of this on the part of the Count, he, like a man of tact, took his departure. But as he reached the door he perceived Satin with her fixed gaze. He understood the position at once, and was quite amused. He went up to her to shake hands.

"We are angry, are we?" he said, pleasantly. "Forgive me."

Satin did not condescend to reply, nor did she turn her eyes from Nana and the Count. He had taken a seat by Nana's side, and was conversing with her. She was uneasy, and asked if his daughter Estelle were any better. The previous evening, the Count had said that the girl

was sad, that his home was wretched; his wife was never there, and his daughter never spoke to him.

Nana was always ready with excellent advice, and when Muffat began again the recital of his grievances, she said, remembering the promise she had made:

"What if you should marry her?"

And then went on to speak of Daguenet. He, at this name, drew himself up haughtily:

"Never, after what she had told him!"

She raised her eyebrows in pretended astonishment.

"Jealous!" she exclaimed. "Can it be possible? I was furious with him because he had said evil things of me, but now I should be in despair."

Just then she caught Satin's eyes over Muffat's shoulder, and averting her glance quickly, continued gravely:

"This marriage ought to take place, my friend. I do not wish to be a hindrance to your daughter's happiness. You will never find a better husband for her than this young man."

And then she launched forth into an extraordinary and extravagant eulogy on Daguenet.

The Count held her hands in his, but gave no decided answer. He would see. They would talk about it another time.

She complained of not feeling well, but the Count would not take the hint. She met Satin's eyes, which were inflexible, and told him bluntly that he must go. He, much hurt, rose and looked for his hat. Just as he was going out he remembered the case of sapphires. He had intended to surprise her when they were alone; but now, in his indignation at being dismissed in this summary way, he lost all interest in it and handed the case to her without a word.

"What is this?" she said. "Ah! sapphires. How kind you are. But do you really think, chéri, that they are the same? In the show case at the jeweller's they were much more effective."

These were her sole thanks, as she allowed him to depart. He glanced at Satin, who was watching him with earnest eyes, looked from her to Nana and turned away.

The door of the vestibule had not fairly closed upon

him, when Satin snatched Nana by the arm, and began to sing and dance. Then, running to the window, she cried:

"Come! let us see how he looks on the sidewalk."

In the shadow of the curtain the two women leaned over the iron railing. The clock struck one. Before them, with its two lines of gas-lights, lonely and forsaken on this damp March night, lay the Avenue des Villiers, swept by occasional blasts of wind laden with rain. A row of houses, in process of building, with their scaffolding still up, stood opposite. And they laughed as they saw Muffat's round shoulders and umbrella reflected in the shining pools under the gas-light.

But Nana bade Satin hush.

"Take care," she said; "there come the police."

They stifled their laughter and watched with a dull fear two dark figures that strode with measured steps down the other side of the Avenue.

Nana, amid all her luxury, had preserved a fear of the police, not liking to hear them spoken of any more than she liked to hear Death alluded to, and felt deadly sick whenever a policeman looked up at her windows as he passed. One never knew what these men might do! They might see fit to take them for *filles* if they should be heard laughing at that hour of the night. Satin pressed close to Nana, and shivered with terror. They still lingered at the window however, interested in watching the gradual approach of a lantern which came up from the side of Lavallois. It was an old chiffonière examining the gutters. Satin recognized her.

"Look," she said, "that is La Reine Pomaré with her osier cashmere on her back—" And while a blast of wind deluged their faces with rain she related to her chérie the story of La Reine Pomaré. She had been a most superb creature, whose beauty was the talk of Paris. All the men were at her feet, and great personages besieged her staircase. And now she drank. The women of the Quartier amused themselves by giving her absinthe. Then, when she had taken too much, the boys stoned her. Hers was a downfall, indeed.

Nana listened, chilled and miserable.

"You shall see her face," said Satin.

She whistled like a man. The chiffonière, who was then under the window, looked up quickly, her face clearly seen by the yellow light of her lantern. Under a ragged silk handkerchief, Nana beheld a wrinkled, seamed face, swollen and distorted, blood-shot eyes, and a mouth fallen in. And Nana, before this frightful old age,—that of a *fille* fallen into mud and drink,—suddenly remembered the vision at Chamont—Irma d'Anglais, who, crowned by years and honors, she had seen going up the steps of her château, in the presence of her obsequious peasantry. Then as Satin whistled again and laughed at the old woman, who could not see them, Nana said, in a changed voice:

"Hush! hush! The police! Come in and shut the window."

The measured tread was returning and rapidly drawing nearer. They closed the window, and turning round, Nana, with her hair all wet with rain, and shivering, stood transfixed, gazing at her salon, which was for the moment as a new place to her. The atmosphere was so warm and so perfumed that she felt a happy surprise.

The piled-up wealth of ornaments—the bronzes and the faïence—astonished her; the luxurious silence of the sleeping hôtel—the stateliness of the grand *salons de reception;* the spacious staircase—filled her with amazement. It was like a sudden outspreading of herself—a tangible exhibition of her passion for domination and pleasure, and of her desire to have everything, only to destroy everything. Never before had she so fully realized the power of her sex.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RACES.

ON a certain Sunday, under a stormy sky in June, the Grand Prix de Paris was contested in the Bois de Boulogne. The sun rose in a red mist; but about eleven o'clock, just as the carriages were driving up to the Hippodrome at Longchamps, a south wind suddenly swept away the clouds. The gray masses were torn, so to speak, into narrow strips, through which the blue sky appeared; and in the brief sunshine which came between two showers, the lawn was gradually crowded with equipages—with gentlemen on horseback and their grooms. The track was still empty, as well as the judges' stand, near which was the starting-post. Opposite, near the scales, were the five symmetrical tribunes, with their galleries of wood and brick. Beyond lay the wide plain,—now flooded with the noon-day sun,—fringed with trees, shut in on the west by the wooded hills of Saint Cloud and Suresnes, and overlooked by the severe profile of Mont Valérien.

Nana, as much in earnest as if the Grand Prix were to decide her fortune, wished to get as near the starting-post as possible. She had come early—one of the first on the ground—in her landau with silver trimmings, harnessed, à la Daumont, to four magnificent white horses, a present from the Comte Muffat. When she appeared at the entrance of the grounds, with two postilions galloping at the heads of her horses, and two footmen motionless behind her carriage, there was as much excitement in the crowd as if a queen had passed by. She wore the colors of the Vandeuvres' stud—blue and white. Her toilette was most extraordinary; the tight-fitting waist and the vest, were of blue silk, the latter setting out at the back in an enormous puff. The skirt was white satin, as were the sleeves, and all trimmed with silver lace that glittered in the sunshine. She wore, moreover, as close an imitation of a jockey cap as possible,—a sort of toque, white also, with

a long, white plume drooping over her chignon and mingled with her hair, that fell in a reddish coil, like a rope, down her back.

Half-past eleven struck—there were still four hours to wait for the Grand Prix. When the landau drew up, Nana extended herself in one corner as if she were at home. She had taken it into her head to bring with her that day Bijou and Louis. The dog lay upon her lap, shivering with cold, in spite of the heat of the day; while the child, dressed like a little Prince, showed his pale face among her laces.

Nana talked very loudly, indifferent as to who were her neighbors. Georges and Philippe were seated opposite her, among a mass of bouquets, white roses, and blue myosotis.

"Yes," she continued, "he wearied me to death, and I showed him the door. He has sulked for two days."

She was talking of Muffat—only she did not tell the young men the true cause of their quarrel. One evening he had found in her chamber a man's hat: instead of reproaching her he fell on his knees with his arms raised to heaven in despair.

"You don't know how queer he is," she continued, amusing herself with their astonishment. "Do you know that he says his prayers every night; he thinks I don't see him and don't know it, but I do. He crosses himself and then—"

"Kisses you, I suppose!" said Philippe, who was somewhat lacking in respect.

"Precisely," answered Nana, with a laugh; "and the worst of it all is, that this sort of thing is growing upon him. I have always believed in Religion—yes, you may laugh, but it is so. He goes too far, though; he talks about Remorse, and then sobs. Now, day before yesterday, after our quarrel, he had a dreadful attack, and—"

She interrupted herself to exclaim:

"Look! There come the Mignons, and they have brought the children. Heavens! how they look!"

The Mignons were in a landau of the severest simplicity—displaying only the comfortable luxury of the wealthy bourgeois. Rose, in a dress of gray silk trimmed with

knots of scarlet ribbons, was smiling and happy in witnessing the enjoyment of Henri and Charles, on the front seat. But when the landau drew up and Rose saw Nana, triumphant among her bouquets, with her four horses and servants in livery, she compressed her lips and turned away her head. Mignon, on the contrary, kissed his hand to her gayly. He, on principle, always kept out of women's quarrels.

"By the way," resumed Nana, "do any of you know a little old man, exquisitely clean and careful in his dress, with bad teeth? A Monsieur Vénot. He came to see me this morning."

"Monsieur Vénot!" said Georges, in astonishment. "It is impossible; he is a Jesuit."

"Precisely; I found that out at once. Oh! you have no idea of the conversation. He was the strangest creature! He talked to me of the Count, of his home being all broken up, and gave me to understand that I could restore happiness to that family. He was excessively polite, and smiled all the time. I told him that I desired nothing better, and that if I ever saw the Count again, I would do my best to manage a reconciliation between him and his wife. You know, too, that I was not telling a story. I really should be enchanted if those two were on the best of terms. It would relieve me, too, for there are days when, I declare to you, that I think he will kill me!"

She regretted this avowal when she heard the hearty laugh with which it was greeted by Georges and Philippe, but all the condensed weariness of the last few months had escaped her in those words, which came from the very bottom of her heart. In addition to everything else, the Count now appeared to be greatly troubled in regard to money matters. He was especially concerned in regard to the note he had given to Labordette, which he saw no prospect of paying.

"Look!" said Georges, who had been gazing about, "the Countess is over there!"

"Where?" cried Nana. "What eyes the child has! Hold my umbrella, Philippe."

But Georges quickly anticipated his brother's movements,

and gladly took the blue umbrella with its silver fringe. Nana lifted an enormous opera-glass to her eyes.

"Ah! yes, I see her," she said, finally. "In the tribune at the right, leaning against a pillar. She is in violet and her daughter by her side is in white. And there is Daguenet just speaking to her."

Then Philippe began to tell her of the approaching marriage of Daguenet to little Estelle.

It was a settled matter now, the banns were published. The Countess had at first resisted, but the Count, they said, was quite determined. Nana smiled.

"I know, I know!" she murmured; "and I am glad of it, for Paul is a good fellow."

Then leaning toward little Louis, she said:

"Are you enjoying yourself? You look very serious."

The child was looking about without a smile; his face had the sad expression of an old man moralizing on the folly of all he saw. Bijou, disturbed by the incessant movements of Nana, left her lap and crept close to the child. Meanwhile the grounds were filling rapidly. A compact crowd of carriages were continually coming in by *La Porte de La Cascade*. There were omnibuses running from the *Boulevard des Italiens*, each of their fifty seats taken; these drew up at the right of the tribunes. Then came victorias of the most correct style, mingled with rattling old fiacres, four-in-hands, and mail-coaches driven by their owners on the high boxes, the servants inside guarding baskets of champagne. There were *araignées* with their immense steel-mounted wheels, tandems as delicate as a piece of clock-work, drawn by two horses and decorated with bells. Occasionally an equestrian galloped past, and a crowd of frightened foot-passengers rushed between the equipages. On reaching the turf the rattle and din stopped suddenly, ending in a dull, rustling sound, and only the general uproar on the ground was heard: shouts and cries and snapping of whips. And when the sun, emerging from the clouds, gleamed upon the highly varnished panels of the carriages, on the harnesses, and light toilettes of the ladies, the scene was indeed a brilliant one, which the coachmen on their high seats seemed to enjoy.

Labordette was seen getting out of a carriage in which

sat Gaga, Clarisse and Blanche de Sévry. As he hurried across the track Nana bade Georges call him, and when he came to her, in obedience to these summons, she said:

"And how much am I to-day?"

She was speaking of the colt—the "Nana," who, at the age of two, had been ignominiously beaten in running for the "*Prix de Cars*," which was won by Lusignan, the other horse of the Vandeuvres' stud. All at once Lusignan had become a favorite, and since the previous evening he was taken two for one.

"Just fifty," answered Labordette.

"Mercy! that is too much!" cried Nana, who was infinitely amused at this joke. "Then I shall not meddle with myself, not a louis will I bet on Nana."

Labordette was eager to hurry away, but she recalled him. She wanted some advice. He was familiar with the world of jockeys and trainers, and his prophecies had been correct more than twenty times.

"Tell me," said Nana, "which horses ought I to put my money on? How are the English?"

"Spirit at three. Valerio II. also at three. Then all the others: Cosmus at twenty-five, Hasard at fifty-five, Boum at thirty, Pichinette at forty, Frangipane at ten."

"No, I will not bet on them, I am too patriotic. I don't know though, perhaps Valerio II. might do—the Duc de Corbreuse looked pretty radiant just now. No, I will not touch anything except Lusignan. Shall I put fifty louis there?"

Labordette looked at her with a strange expression. She leaned toward him and asked several questions, in a low voice, for she knew that Vandeuvres allowed him to make up his book for him. If he had learned anything, she asked, coaxingly, he might as well tell her, but Labordette would not vouchsafe an explanation; he simply told her that if she wished he would place her fifty louis where she would not regret it.

"Do as you choose," she called after him, "bet on the horses as you please, but not on Nana, she is a jade."

Everybody in the carriage shouted with laughter, the young men thought the word a very droll one, while little

Louis, not understanding, lifted his lustreless eyes to his mother's, surprised at hearing her speak so loudly.

Labordette had not, however, succeeded in making his escape. Rose Mignon signed to him to go to her; she gave him some orders, and he wrote some figures down in his memorandum book. Then Clarisse and Gaga called him to change their bets. They had caught some words in the crowd; they threw over Valerio II. and were eager to put their money on Lusignan. Their impassible agent, Labordette, wrote all down without a word, and at last got away.

The carriages were still coming in, and were now stationed in a fifth row—a dark, compact mass, with occasional light spots, made by white horses. Beyond these was a crowd of other vehicles, without any attempt at order; while over the turf galloped riders on magnificent animals, and groups of gentlemen stood and walked about. On this edge of this field were refreshment stands, under gray linen tents, which looked white in the sun.

The thickest of the crowd was about the book-makers, standing up in their open carriages gesticulating like tooth-pullers at a fair.

"It is too stupid, not even to know on what horse one is betting," said Nana. "I mean to risk a few louis by myself."

She stood up to find some book-maker whose face might inspire her with confidence; but on discovering many persons of her acquaintance she forgot her intention. Beyond the Mignons, beyond Gaga, Clarisse and Blanche de Sévry, she saw in the centre of the crowd which now imprisoned her landau, Tatan Néné with Maria Blond, in a victoria; Caroline Héquet and her mother, accompanied by two men; Louise Violaine, all alone, driving herself in a basket wagon gay with ribbons, the colors of the Verdier stables—orange and green; Leá de Horn upon the high seat of a mail-coach, accompanied by a dozen noisy youths. Further off still, in a most aristocratic-looking carriage, sat Lucy Stewart unexceptionably dressed in black silk and Chantilly, all very simple, but very elegant, and having an air of great distinction. By her side was a young man in naval uniform

But Nana was stupefied by seeing Simonne in a tandem driven by Steiner, with a lacquey on a high seat behind, who sat with folded arms, as immovable as if carved out of stone. She was absolutely dazzling, in white satin striped with yellow, with diamonds and gold on her hat; while the Banker, with an enormous whip in his hand, drove two horses, the leader a small light sorrel with short, dainty steps, the second a brown bay that lifted his feet very high.

"Upon my word," said Nana, very audibly, "that thief Steiner has cleaned out the Bourse! Simonne thinks she is a model of style, I suppose!"

But she bowed and smiled as she waved her hand, delighted at an opportunity of making herself conspicuous, and continued to rattle on.

"That is her son that Lucy Stewart has with her. He is handsome in his uniform. You know she is afraid of him, and he thinks her an actress. That is why she is so quiet in her air to-day. Poor fellow! he never seems to suspect."

"Pshaw!" murmured Philippe, laughing; "she will find an heiress for him in the Provinces."

Nana became suddenly silent. She had just seen La Tricon, who, coming in an ordinary fiacre from which she could see nothing, had calmly taken her seat by the side of the coachman. Tall and erect, with her dignified face and soft English curls, she overlooked the crowd and seemed to reign over her kingdom of women, who recognized her with discreet smiles. She, however, affected not to see them. Besides, she was not there on business, but watched the races with intense pleasure, having a passion for horses.

"Look! There is that idiot of a Faloise," said Georges, suddenly.

This was another astonishment. Nana had some difficulty in recognizing him. Since he had come into his fortune his *chic* was something extraordinary. He was dressed in a tight-fitting suit of light gray, affected the greatest possible lassitude, and in the lowest, gentlest voice began sentences which he did not take the trouble to finish

"But he is very nice!" Nana declared, quite carried away by his appearance.

Gaga and Clarisse called La Faloise, throwing themselves at his head, each eager to win him back. He remained with them only a moment, and left them with a shrug of disdain.

Nana had dazzled him. He hurried to her and stood on the step of her carriage to shake hands with her. And as she laughed at him and at his former passion for Gaga, he murmured:

"Ah! that is all over, and now, as you well know, you occupy me entirely."

His hand was on his heart as he uttered these words, and Nana laughed immoderately at this sudden and public declaration. She resumed at last:

"You have made me forget that I wanted to bet. Georges, you see that book-maker over there, that stout, red-faced one with curly hair. I like his looks. Go to him and take— What would you take?"

"Well, as I am no patriot," lisped La Faloise, "I have made my bets all on the English horses."

Nana was quite scandalized.

Then they began to discuss the merits of the horses. La Faloise affected to be thoroughly conversant with them. He declared that Valerio II., of the Corbreuse stable had been under the weather lately. He knew it, but to most persons it was as yet a secret. He ended by advising Nana to put her money on Hasard, a horse in the Mécham stables, the most inferior of all, of whom no one was taking any notice. Hasard, he asserted, was magnificently built, and then such action! Every one would be surprised, he declared, before the day was over.

"No," said Nana. "I shall put ten louis on Lusignan and five on Boum."

Upon this La Faloise burst forth:

"That is utter nonsense! Gase himself makes no bets on his own horse; and as to Lusignan, he is a failure. Think of it for yourself: by Lamb out of Princess! They are both too short in the legs."

His energy seemed to choke him. Philippe remarked

that Lusignan had, nevertheless, won the *Des Cars* prize, and the *Grande Poule des Produits*.

But the other answered: "What does that prove?—nothing at all." In his opinion it was all the more reason to be cautious about him. Besides, it was Gresham who rode Lusignan, and Gresham would never come in first any way.

From one end of the grounds to the other, this discussion, which began in Nana's landau, seemed to spread. Haggard eyes brightened, worn and weary faces became animated under the influence of this passion for gambling. The book-makers, high up in their carriages, shouted furiously, all the time writing down long rows of figures. The highest betting was near the scales. The great battle finally concentrated on Lusignan and Spirit. The Englishmen were especially conspicuous, as they walked about, glowing with prospective triumph. Bramah, one of Lord Reading's horses, had won the Grand Prix the previous year, and many hearts still bled at their defeat. It would be a positive disaster should France be beaten again. All the ladies became immensely excited—their national pride was touched. The Vandeuvres' stables became the ramparts of their honor, Lusignan was admired and applauded. Gaga, Blanche, Louise, and Caroline made their bets on Lusignan. Lucy Stewart, on her son's account, held aloof; but the report was in circulation that Rose Mignon had given Labordette a commission for two hundred louis. La Tricon waited until the very last minute, quite undisturbed by the hubbub around her—a noise constantly on the increase, where the names of the horses were repeated over and over again in the quick, shrill Parisian tones and the guttural voices of the English. She listened to all that was said and quietly made her own notes.

"And Nana?" said La Faloise. "Does no one intend to ask about the colt?"

No one had asked and no one seemed to feel any interest. This outsider from the Vandeuvres' stable was sunk under the growing popularity of Lusignan. Then the jests began again; Nana said that Vandeuvres had given her a lovely god-child—an animal that was not worth five sous—Philippe and Georges admitted that it was certainly no

compliment. But La Faloise suddenly raised his arm high in the air, and cried out that he had an inspiration:

"I shall put a louis on Nana."

"Bravo!" said Georges; "and I will put two—"

"And I, three louis," added Philippe.

The men began to be interested, and declared it was shameful to desert Nana in this way—they would make the colt a success yet. Nana was much amused by these follies. But, as the three young men departed to issue their propaganda, she called after them:

"You know that I am not with you. Georges, remember,—put ten louis on Lusignan and five on Valerio II.!"

She watched them as they made their way among the wheels, close to the heads of the horses. As soon as they saw any people they knew in the carriages they stood upon the steps and lauded Nana. They went over the whole enclosure in this way, and finally returned quite triumphant, while Nana herself waved her umbrella gayly. After all, they had not done very much. Steiner, who had been much moved by the sight of Nana, risked three louis, but the women absolutely refused. Did they wish to throw away their money? No; not they. Nor did they much care to minister to the triumph of a woman who overwhelmed them with her four white horses and her outriders and her grand airs. Gaga and Clarisse asked La Faloise, with cold dignity, if he were laughing at them. When Georges presented himself, with boyish audacity, at the Mignon landau, Rose turned away her head without vouchsafing any reply whatever. But Mignon looked after the youth with an amused smile, saying that the sex brought good luck.

"Well?" asked Nana, when the young men came back after a long visit to the book-maker.

"You are at forty," said La Faloise.

"How do you mean? At forty!" she cried, in amazement. "I was at fifty; what is going on?"

Labordette now appeared. The gates were shut, the first race was about to come off. Nana took advantage of the distraction caused by this announcement, and questioned him closely. But he answered evasively, and she was obliged to be contented with what he chose to tell her.

He added, moreover, that Vandeuvres would be there presently if he could possibly get away.

This race ended almost unnoticed, and all at once a cloud broke over the Hippodrome, and the rain poured down. A furious gale of wind rose at the same time; utter confusion reigned for a few minutes. The women in the carriages did their best to shelter themselves, and held their umbrellas in both hands, while the terrified lacqueys put up the tops. But the shower was over in a moment, the sun blazed forth again, and the women began to laugh once more.

"Ah! poor, little Louis!" said Nana. "Are you very wet, chéri?"

The child, without speaking, held out his hands. Nana dried them with her handkerchief, and then turned her attention to Bijou, who was all in a shiver. It was nothing, she said, only a few spots on her white satin toilette. The flowers were refreshed and looked like piles of snow; she took up a bouquet and plunged her face in it, enjoying its dewy fragrance.

The stands were crowded by the shower. Nana examined them with her glasses; at this distance only a compact mass was seen, specked by the whiteness of the faces. The sun now touched the crowd in one corner, and a few black figures, a little isolated, stood out against the sky.

Nana was very much amused by those ladies whom the shower had driven from the rows of chairs on the gravel walk at the foot of the tribunes; these ladies now returned to their places in great confusion. As the entrance to this place was absolutely interdicted to the *filles*, Nana made many sharp remarks on these ladies who, she declared, were dowdy and ill-dressed.

A little bustle was noticed in the enclosure, and the rumor ran through the crowd that the Empress was about to appear in the small central tribune—a pavilion, built like a chalet, whose wide balcony was filled with low, red chairs—and every opera-glass was directed to this balcony.

"There he is!" cried Georges, "he is with her; I did not know he was on duty this week."

Georges was speaking of Count Muffat, whose stiff figure and solemn face he had perceived behind the Empress.

Then the young men began to laugh; they said it was a pity that Satin was not there to see him too. But Nana stopped laughing when she saw that the Empress was accompanied by the Prince d'Ecosse.

"Look at the Prince!" she cried. She thought he had grown much stouter in the eighteen months that had elapsed since she last saw him.

There was a good deal of gossip going on about her in the surrounding carriages. They whispered that the Comte de Muffat had left her. The Tuileries were scandalized at the Count's conduct, since he had made himself so conspicuous by his relations with her. The Empress had spoken to him—her very words were repeated. He, in order to keep his position as chamberlain, was obliged to break with Nana.

La Faloise, hearing this story, came at once to Nana and asked, bluntly, if he might be permitted to take the Count's place.

But she laughed aloud.

"It is a silly falsehood," she answered. "I have but to whistle and he will be back. You do not know him."

For some moments she had been watching the Comtesse Sabine and Estelle. Daguenet was still near them. Fauchéry, who had disturbed everybody by his determination to pay his respects to these two ladies, also remained with them, smiling and contented. Nana looked from one to another, and then, with a contemptuous wave of her hand, including the whole row of seats:

"These people are all stupid," she said, "I know them only too well; I have not a shadow of respect for any of them. They are all equally worthless, from the lowest to the highest."

And her gesture included the grooms who were leading the horses on the track, as well as the Sovereign who was conversing with the Prince.

"Bravo, Nana! Bravo!" cried La Faloise, enthusiastically.

The sound of the bells was lost in the wind, and the race continued. The *Prix d'Ispahan* had just been won by Berlagol, from the Mécham stable. Nana called Labordette to ask about her hundred louis. He began to

laugh, and refused to give her the names of her horses, lest he should spoil her luck. Her money was well placed, as she would soon see. Then she told him of her own bets—ten louis on Lusignan and five on Valerio II. He shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say that women were always doing stupid things. This impressed her somewhat.

At this moment the enclosure was especially animated; lunches were organized in the open air; everybody was eating and drinking, on the turf, in the carriages, and on the high seats of the four-in-hands. It was one grand display of cold meats, a breaking loose of baskets of champagne, whose corks were popping in every direction, enlivened by jests and laughs; the jingle of glass added another note to the various chords. Gaga and Clarisse took quite a solid meal; they, with Blanche de Sévry, eat their sandwiches with a cloth spread over their laps Louise Violaine left her basket-wagon and joined Caroline Héquet; and the gentlemen arranged a little stand where Simonne, Tatan Néné and Maria Blond went for their champagne; while above, on the box of Leá de Horn's mail-coach, bottle after bottle was emptied; the whole party seemed eager to intoxicate themselves in the full light of the sun, and in their conspicuous position.

There was a crowd around Nana's landau. She stood assuming the manner of a cantinière, and poured out glasses of champagne for the men who came up to bow to her. One of her footmen, François, was kept busy passing the bottles, while La Faloise, trying to speak in the coarse voice of an innkeeper, called out:

"Come on, gentlemen! come on! your drinks are all free!"

"Do be quiet," said Nana, at last. "We look like strolling players."

She thought this great fun, however, and was sorely tempted to send Georges with a glass of champagne to Rose Mignon, who never drank any. Nana insisted that this was the merest affectation. "She was a nice person, really, to lay down the law for others! the two children were dying for a drop of champagne." But Georges, though he took the glass in his hand, drank its contents. He feared a scene if he carried it to Rose. Then Nana thought of little Louis, whom she had forgotten. He had

retreated behind her. She compelled him to come out and drink some wine, which made him cough frightfully.

"Come on, gentlemen! come on!" repeated La Faloise, who had not tired of his joke. "It won't cost you two sous—no, nor one sou. We give it away."

But Nana interrupted him by exclaiming:

"Ah! there is Bordenave. Call him, Philippe. Oh! run, I beg of you!"

It was indeed Bordenave, strolling along with his hands behind him; wearing a rusty hat and a coat that was all white in the seams, greasy and shabby—a Bordenave who was nearly extinguished by misfortune, but who did not hesitate to parade his poverty among these people who had known him in better days, and who knew, moreover, that fortune's wheel might yet have another turn for him.

"Zounds! my dear, how swell you are!" he said, when Nana leaned toward him with extended hand.

Then, after emptying a glass of champagne, he drew a long sigh.

"Ah!" he said, "if I were only a woman! Say, my dear, will you go back on the stage? I have an idea. I will hire the Gaiété, and we will take Paris off her feet. You ought to do as much as that for me, I am sure!"

And he continued to grumble, glad though he was, to see this confounded Nana, who, he said, always warmed the cockles of his heart, even to look at her.

The crowd increased; one by one all the men in the enclosure whom Nana knew came to speak to her. She had a droll word, a laugh, or a nod for each. These men had all drank too much champagne, and she presided over the glasses which were held out to her, with her yellow hair tossed by the breeze, and her fair face bathed in the warm June sun. Finally, in order to enrage the other women, who were indignant at her triumph, she raised her brimming glass in her old pose of Venus Victorious.

But some one touched her on the shoulder, and turning she was much surprised to see Mignon on the seat. She disappeared for a moment, for she sank down at his side to hear something important that he wished to confide to her. Mignon had a horror of women's quarrels and jealousies—he thought them stupid and useless, and he never

hesitated to say to Rose that it was worse than silly to quarrel with Nana. He himself was always kind, and even paternal in his manner to her.

"Look here, my dear," he said; "don't be imprudent, and provoke Rose too far. I warn you in all kindness, and I beg of you to pay attention to my words. She has something she can use against you, and she has never forgiven you for that affair of *La Petite Duchesse*."

"Something she can use against me?" repeated Nana, "I don't understand."

"Listen, then. It is a letter she found in Fauchéry's pocket: a letter written to that scamp of a Fauchéry by the Comtesse Muffat. Now do you understand? And Rose wants to send this letter to Comte Muffat to revenge herself on you and on him."

"What is that to me!" cried Nana. "Let her do it, if she chooses; we shall only laugh at her!"

"No, no; I will not have anything of the kind," answered Mignon, promptly. "I will countenance no such scandal. We have nothing to gain by it—"

He stopped, fearing that he had said too much.

She looked at him fixedly. What was his motive for all this? Probably he feared that Fauchéry would again interfere with his ménage if he broke with the Countess. It was that, perhaps, that Rose desired, for she had always preserved a certain tendresse for the journalist. And Nana became very thoughtful. All at once she remembered Monsieur Vénot's visit, and an idea occurred to her, while Mignon went on:

"Let us suppose," he said, "that Rose sends this letter: there is an esclandre. You are mixed up in it. You are accused of being the sole cause of all the trouble; the Count separates from his wife—"

"Why so?" she said. "On the contrary—"

She checked herself in her turn, remembering that it was not necessary for her to think aloud. She pretended to enter into Mignon's views in order to get him away as soon as possible, and as he advised complete submission to Rose—even a little visit to her on the race-ground—she answered that she would think about it—that she would see.

A sudden commotion and stir about her induced her to rise hastily to her feet. The horses were coming along the track like the wind itself. It was the *Prix de la Ville de Paris*, won by Cornemuse, from the Verdier stables. And now that the Grand Prix was to be run, the excitement was momentarily increasing. The crowd swayed hither and thither as if blown by a fierce wind. And at this last moment a great surprise awaited the betting men, for the outsider of the Vandeuvres' stables, the colt Nana, was steadily rising. Philippe and Georges, who had been about questioning the book-makers, came back every ten minutes with a new report. Nana was at thirty; Nana was at twenty-five; then at twenty; and then fifteen. Nobody could understand it. A colt that had been beaten at all the Hippodromes; a colt that was not known, and on which not a bet had been made that very morning. What did this sudden change mean? Some of the men laughed, and some sneered as they spoke of the nice cleaning out the fools would get who had got taken in by this game.

Others, serious and uneasy, suspected that there was something hidden. There was evidently "a coup" for some one. Whispers ran about the ground; allusions were made to some old stories and to the tolerated cheater on race-courses; but this time the honorable name of Vandeuvres arrested all these accusations, and the skeptics declared that Nana would come in last.

"But who is Nana's jockey?" asked La Faloise.

Just then the true Nana rose to her feet. As the men saw fit to laugh at the idea of the colt winning, she bowed low and said:

"It is Price."

Price was an English celebrity, then unknown in France. Why had Vandeuvres sent for this jockey when Gresham usually had Nana? Besides, was it not a little singular that he had confided Lusignan to this Gresham, who never won, as La Faloise said? But all these remarks were lost in the gay disputes and loud merriment of the jostling crowd, who drank more champagne to pass away the time. Then there was a sudden hush. Vandeuvres

was making his way through the crowd. He went up to Nana. She affected to be angry.

"Upon my word," she exclaimed, "you might as well not have come at all, as to make your appearance at this late hour! I am dying to get inside the grounds."

"Then come," he answered, "there is still time. And I have a lady's ticket in my pocket."

He offered her his arm, and she sailed off happy in the jealous glare of Gaga's and the other women's eyes. The Hujon brothers and La Faloise remained in the landau and did the honors of her champagne. She called out to them that she would be back presently.

But Vandeuvres, seeing Labordette, beckoned him, and a few rapid words were exchanged between them.

"You have gotten it all together?"

"Yes."

"And for how much?"

"Fifteen hundred Louis or a little over."

Nana listened attentively, but they said no more. Vandeuvres was in a state of nervous excitement. His light eyes flashed with the same fire that blazed in them the night he talked of perishing with his horses in the flames. As they crossed the track she said softly:

"Come now, tell me all about it. Why is your colt going up in this strange way?"

He started.

"Ah! they are talking about it, are they? What people these racing men are! When I have a favorite, they give me no chance, and when an outsider is asked, they howl as if they were being cheated."

"But I want to know something about it," she answered, "for I have been betting. What are the chances?"

He lost his temper entirely, without any apparent reason.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed; "every one of the horses has its chances. The colt has gone up because bets are made on her—by whom? How can I tell? what do I care? I wish I had left you in your carriage, if you only came with me to torment me with idiotic questions."

This way of speaking was neither habitual nor natural with him. She was more astonished than hurt. He, however, calmed down almost immediately, and seemed some-

what embarrassed; and when she asked him, coldly, if he could not manage to be a little more civil, he begged her pardon. He for some time had been subject to these flashes of temper, he said.

Everybody in the gay world of Paris knew that he was that day playing his last card. If his horses did not win —if they failed to bring him back the enormous sums he had bet upon them—he was lost; disaster, utter and overwhelming, was his—the downfall of his credit, as well as of those external appearances which covered the disorder and the debt of his daily life. Every one knew also that Nana—the cannibal, as she was called—had finished him up; had been the last to gather up the fragments of this shattered fortune, with the eagerness of a *fille* whose wicked hands mar and destroy all that they touch. Her mad caprices were recounted. A story was told of a trip to Baden, where she had not left him money enough to pay his bill at the hôtel; another of her throwing, one night, when she had drank too much champagne, a handful of diamonds into a chafing-dish, to see if they would burn like coal. She had taken possession—huge, vulgar, creature that she was—of this impoverished son of an ancient race; she owned him, body and soul, and ruled over him. For her he would run any risk, and carried away by her influence had even lost his ancient skepticism. A week before, he had promised her a château on the coast of Normandy, between Honfleur and Trouville, and he meant to keep his word; but just now she drove him distracted, and he would have liked to shake her for her stupidity.

Meanwhile the guard allowed them to enter the grounds, not daring to stop this woman on the arm of the Count. Nana was thrilled with joy at having her foot at last on this forbidden ground, and walked slowly past all these ladies, seated in their chairs in front of the tribunes. There were ten rows of these chairs, and not one vacant seat among them. Little groups were gathered, and familiar circles made as if in a public garden; while children ran from one to another; and back were the tribunes, their rows of seats rising one above the other. Under the shade of the roof, the toilettes here looked duller. Nana stared at all the ladies as she faced them, particularly at the Comtesse

Sabine and her daughter, Estelle. As she reached the Imperial Tribune and she caught a glimpse of Muffat standing behind the Empress, in all his official stiffness, she was infinitely amused.

"Oh, how stupid he looks!" she said most audibly to Vandeuvres.

She wished to see all; this end of the park, with its wide avenues, thick turf and clumps of trees, did not amuse her particularly. Under a thatched roof was a buffet, about which men were clamoring and gesticulating. Then she saw the empty boxes and one solitary horse belonging to a gendarme. There was the paddock, too,—a square of one hundred mêtres,—where a stable-boy was walking Valero II. about, all wrapped in blankets. The crowd of men, with their card of admittance—an orange spot fastened to their button-holes—and a continual rush, up and down the stairs and along the piazzas, of this privileged crowd, amused her for a while; but, after all, it was not worth the trouble to come and see all this—merely to be made to feel that she could not enter also.

Daguenet and Fauchéry passed her and bowed. She made them a sign to come to her and stood still to speak to them. Then, suddenly interrupting herself, she exclaimed:

"How old the Marquis de Chouard is growing! What is he doing nowadays?"

Daguenet told her of the last transaction of the old gentleman—something that had taken place a few days before, of which no one yet knew.

Nana looked quite shocked and had a great deal to say upon the subject. Vandeuvres did not listen—he was anxious to get rid of her. But Fauchéry having said that if she had not seen the book-makers she had seen nothing, the Comte was obliged to take her there, notwithstanding his visible reluctance.

At last she was amused and interested, for the scene was indeed a curious one.

A rotunda was open before her, between lawns shaded by young chestnut trees. And there, in a large circle, stood a close line of book-makers awaiting customers, as if

at a fair. In order to overlook the crowd they stood upon wooden benches, and had their quotations close at hand, fastened to the trees, while they wrote down the bets—catching them from a nod or a wink, with such rapidity that the gaping lookers-on failed to comprehend their movements.

The scene was one of wild confusion. Numbers were called out, and shouts were uttered at an unexpected bit of intelligence, conveyed by breathless men, who rushed up, hurled out a few words without stopping, and were gone again.

"How droll they all look," murmured Nana, much amused. "But I must say that I should not like to meet some of these fierce faces alone at midnight!"

Vandeuvres pointed out one book-maker who had made three millions in two years. He was tall, slender, and fair, and was addressed with the greatest respect: people pushed through the crowd to see him,—while he went on with his business, caring little for the curiosity with which he was watched.

Finally, Vandeuvres induced Nana to leave this place, and as they did so the Count nodded to another book-maker, who was a former coachman of his own—an enormous fellow, with the shoulders of an ox and a ruddy face. Now that he was tempting Fortune on the race-ground, Vandeuvres was trying to help him on, and made him his confidant whenever he had any bets to make that he wished to keep secret. Notwithstanding this protection, the man had lost some very heavy sums, and was also playing his last card, with bloodshot eyes and looking as if he might at any moment be struck down with apoplexy.

"Ah! Maréchal," said Vandeuvres, in a low voice, as the man approached; "how do you stand now?"

"At five thousand louis, Monsieur le Comte," answered the man, also lowering his voice. "It is a very nice thing, too. I assure you that I have lowered the quotation—put it down to three—"

Vandeuvres looked much annoyed.

"No, no; I will not have it," he said. "Put it back again at two, instantly. I shall never tell you anything again, Maréchal."

"But Monsieur le Comte, what can I do?" replied the boner, with the humble smile of the accomplice who knows he has his man in his power. "I must do something to induce the people to give you your two thousand louis."

Then Vandeuvres bade him be silent, and, as he went away, Maréchal started as if to run after him—regretting that he had not questioned him about the colt; it was certainly proper that he should know something definite as to the chances of this animal. But Vandeuvres was already too far off. Nana, who had caught the whispered words of the book-maker, was excessively astonished, but asked no explanation. She became very grave, however, and watched him in a stealthy manner.

He seemed very nervous, and, meeting Labordette, he begged her to go with him.

"Take her back to the carriage," he said. "I must see a man on business—but I will be with you almost immediately."

He entered the hall, a narrow room with a low ceiling, nearly filled up with the scales, and a desk shut in by glass and oak framework. It was like a baggage-room at a railway station. Nana was here greatly undeceived. She had expected to see some huge machinery with which the horses were weighed.

What! did they only weigh the jockeys? What was the use of making such a fuss about their weight? In the scales sat a jockey with an idiotic air, his harness on his knees, waiting until a stout man had verified his weight; while a groom at the door held the horse Valerio II., around which the crowd had gathered.

The gate was about to be closed. Labordette hurried Nana on, but paused a moment to point out a little man, who was talking somewhat apart with Vandeuvres.

"That is Price," he said.

"Ah! yes; Nana's English jockey," she answered, smiling.

She declared that the jockey was the ugliest creature she had ever beheld. "All the jockeys looked like crétins," she said, and wondered how they were prevented from growing. Price, a man of some forty years, looked like an old, dried-up child, with a long, thin face, seamed and

wrinkled, hard and expressionless. His frame was all knots and sinews, and the blue jacket, with its white sleeves, looked as if thrown on a figure of wood.

"No," she said, as they went on, "I certainly shall not lose my heart to him."

The crowd was almost impassable on the track; the trodden grass had become almost black. Before the two indicators, on the high columns, the pressure was greater than elsewhere, and the mass welcomed with shouts each number which an electric wire from the weighing room signalled as soon as the horse to which it belonged was ready to start.

Nana had only time to cross the track on the arm of Labordette—the bell hanging to the staff of the oriflamme, rang for the track to be cleared.

"Well, my children," she said, as she returned to her landau, "let me tell you that their weighing room is a perfect humbug."

They shouted and clapped their hands.

"Bravo, Nana! Bravo! Nana has come back to us!' they cried.

"How silly you are!" she answered. "Did you think I had run away? Attention."

The champagne was forgotten in the excitement of the coming race.

But Nana was considerably taken aback by seeing Gaga in her carriage with Bijou and Louis on her lap. Gaga had taken this course merely to approach La Faloise. But she said she could not resist the child; she adored children.

"By the way, how is Lili?" asked Nana. "And why on earth is she shut up in that coupé with that old man? I have just heard—"

Gaga put on a most despairing expression.

"My dear," she said, "I am in despair, and really ill from it all. Yesterday I never left my bed; I had wept so incessantly that my strength was gone, and this morning I did not think I could come. You know how I feel about it. I brought her up in a convent school, and educated her to make a good marriage. She has had the best advice, and the most constant supervision; but it was all

of no use; she would have her own way. Such a scene as it was! Tears and ungrateful words. She found her life with me too confining, she said. And when she finally exclaimed, 'You are the last one who has any right to hinder me,' I cried out, in my turn, 'Do what you will! forsake us if you choose!' This was construed into a consent, and she took the bit between her teeth. And now my last hope has gone, and my last dream has perished!"

The sound of angry voices made the two women look around. It was Georges, who was defending Vandeuvres against the vague rumors that were in circulation. The Count was a friend of Nana's; that was enough for Georges.

"Why do you say he drops his own horse?" cried the youth. "Yesterday he took up a bet of a thousand louis on Lusignan."

"Yes; I was there," Philippe affirmed.

"And he has not put a single louis on Nana. If Nana stands at ten, he has nothing to do with it. It is ridiculous to talk in this way of people! What interest would he have in doing what you hint?"

Labordette listened to the dispute calmly; then shrugged his shoulders, as he said to Georges:

"Why do you take any notice of this sort of talk? The Count has just made a bet of five hundred louis on Lusignan, and if he has offered a hundred louis on Nana, it is because he very well knows that a man must at least appear to believe in his own horses."

"Hush! what do we care for all that?" shouted La Faloise, waving his arms. "Spirit will win! Three cheers for Old England!"

A shiver ran through the crowd, while the bell notified the assembled multitude that the horses had reached the track. Then Nana jumped up on the seat of her carriage, that she might see better, crushing under her feet all her roses and myosotis. With one glance she swept the horizon. The track was momentarily empty, shut in by its gray fences and guarded by the police, and the strip of turf—muddy and torn at her feet—was, further off, of a delicate green, changing to a deeper shade in the distance

Then in the centre, as she looked down, she beheld the surging crowd clinging to the carriages, neighing horses, tents cracking in the wind, riders spurring on their horses; while on the other side the tribunes were crammed—row after row of heads, the upper ones standing out against the blue sky. Beyond all these stretched the level plain, and back of the ivy-covered windmill were a series of meadows and scattered clumps of trees, and opposite, outspread towards the Seine, were long avenues and countless carriages. Then, in the direction of Boulogne, the country on the left opened broadly, showing the distant Mendon; nearer was a long avenue of Paulonias, whose summits, without a leaf, were shining and softly flushed. Up the winding road carriages were still coming. But all at once the hundred thousand souls that covered these fields like so many insects were moved as by one impulse. The sun that had been under a cloud burst forth once more, and was welcomed with hearty applause.

Meanwhile a police-officer crossed the vacant track, and further on toward the left, a man appeared with a red flag in his hand.

"It is the starter—the Baron de Mauriac," said Labordette, in reply to a question from Nana.

Every one spoke at once.

"Don't push!" "Let me see!" "Ah! that is the judge, Monsieur de Sonagny, is it?" "Look! the oriflamme is raised!" "Hush! attention!" "Cosmus is the first!"

A red and yellow oriflamme rattled in the wind at the top of the flagstaff. The horses appeared one by one, led by the grooms, with their jockeys in the saddle, their arms hanging loosely at their sides. After Cosmus came Hasard and Boum; then a long, low murmur greeted Spirit, a superb bay horse, whose dull hues—lemon-color and black—had a certain Britannic dreariness. Valerio II. had a sucess d'entrée in pale green, striped with rose-color. Vandeuvres' two horses were late; but at last, behind Frangipane, appeared the gay blue and white ribbons. But Lusignan—a dark bay, irreproachable in form—was almost forgotten in the surprise caused by Nana. She had never been well seen before, and the broad

sunlight fell full on the shining flanks of the beautiful creature—deep-chested, with a slender head—her coat looked almost of a reddish blonde.

"She has hair like mine!" cried Nana, in delight, "and I am quite proud of my namesake."

Some of the men climbed up on the landau. Bordenave nearly trod on Louis, whose mother had forgotten him, and then picked up the child and put him on his shoulder.

"Poor little mite!" he said. "Look! I will show you where mamma is."

And as Bijou scratched to be taken up, the little creature was also lifted; while Nana glanced over at the other women to see how they bore this last triumph. Clarisse, Louise, and Maria looked very much out of temper; Rose Mignon, who was gazing at her, turned her head away, vexed at having been surprised.

At this moment La Tricon, up to this moment as motionless as a statue, waved her hands and made a signal over the crowd to a book-maker. Her choice was made: her bets were on Nana.

La Faloise meanwhile was very busy.

"I have an inspiration," he cried. "You see Frangipane? Was there ever such action as his? I shall bet on Frangipane."

"If you do, you will be sorry," said Labordette. "Wait until you see his canter."

The horses now started on their preliminary trial, passing before the tribunes; then the men burst forth again, talking all together.

"Lusignan is too long in the back!" "I shall bet a hand on Valerio II.!" "He is nervous and holds his head high when he gallops, which is a very bad sign." "It is Bume, is it, who rides Spirit?" "You say that the orange is the Verdier stables, do you?" "I tell you he had no shoulders!" "No, indeed! Spirit is too quiet! altogether too quiet!" "Listen! I saw Nana after the Grand Ponte des Produits, dripping with sweat and shivering from head to foot. I will bet you twenty louis that she comes in far in the rear."

La Faloise, almost in tears, was trying to find a book-maker, but at this decisive moment every one seemed

absorbed. The first departure was bad. The starter, a minute black figure in the distance, did not lower his red flag. The horses came back; there were two more false starts. At last they all went off together, so well that there was an outburst of applause.

The uproar was stifled in the anxiety which filled every breast. The bets were all made, and a breathless silence reigned. White faces leaned forward, and eyes were strained. Hasard and Cosmus took the lead, Valerio II. next, and the others followed. When they passed the tribunes—with flying gravel and a windy rush—Frangipane was behind, and Nana a little in the rear of Spirit and Lusignan. Every eye was fixed on the dazzling spots made by the jockeys in the sunshine. Valerio II. was now leading Cosmus and Hasard losing ground, while Lusignan and Spirit, neck and neck, were still in advance of Nana.

"The English will win," muttered Bordenave, "that is plain. Lusignan is getting tired, and Valerio II. cannot hold out."

"Ah, well! it can't be helped!" said Philippe with patriotic grief.

It was with a pang that these people anticipated another defeat, and their most earnest wishes were devoted to Lusignan's success. The crowd surged toward the further fences. A number of horsemen galloped across the turf. Nana watched them as they disappeared behind the trees planted in the centre of the Hippodrome.

"Wait!" cried Georges, always sanguine. "It is not settled yet. I believe the English horse is blown!"

But La Faloise resumed his national disdain, and shouted:

"Bravo! Bravo for Spirit!"

Labordette was very indignant, and declared that if he said that again he would put him in the bottom of the carriage.

"Let us time them," said Bordenave, quietly, still holding Louis, and drawing out his watch.

At this moment the horses reappeared one by one from behind the trees. After an instant's surprise there was a long low murmur.

Valerio II. was still ahead; but Spirit had gained, Lusignan had lost ground, and another horse had taken his place. At first no one could tell which horse it was. Presently some one cried:

"It is Nana! yes, it is Nana! Now do you see? Bravo, Nana!"

The colt continued to gain, slowly but surely. The excitement became intense. No one took any notice of the other horses. The contest was entirely between Spirit, Nana, Lusignan and Valerio II. Their progress was noted and called aloud. Nana herself, who was now standing on the coachman's seat, was deadly pale, and trembling to that degree that she could not speak. Labordette was radiant with smiles.

"What do you say of the English horse now?" asked Philippe.

"At any rate Lusignan is done for!" murmured La Faloise. "It is Valerio II. that will win the day. Look! the four are all neck and neck!"

By this time the four horses were coming on like the wind. The roar of the crowd and the excitement was something tremendous—it was like the noise of the sea. A hundred thousand spectators throbbed with one emotion, and burned with the same wild thirst behind these animals, whose flying feet bore millions away; the people pushed and crowded each other, with clenched hands and parted lips, each thinking only of himself, each man encouraging the horse on which his bets were made by voice and gesture. And the cry of all these people was like the cry of a wild beast.

"Here they come! Here they come!"

But Nana had gained ground. Valerio II. was distanced, and she was even with Spirit. She was greeted by a shout from the landau.

"Bravo! Nana! Bravo!"

Standing on the seat, Nana, perfectly unconsciously, was swaying to and fro, with a motion almost as if she were running. She struck her side involuntarily, as if urging on the colt, and at each blow she uttered a sigh of fatigue, and said, in a low voice:

"On with you! on with you!"

Then a superb sight was seen. Price, standing in his stirrup, was lashing Nana with an arm of iron. This withered little man, with his dried and mummy-like face, was transformed. His eyes flashed fire. He gave his whole heart to the work. He fairly carried the pony on by sheer force of will. She was bathed in sweat, and her eyes were bloodshot. The whole cavalcade swept on, the judge, with his calm, impassive face, watching them. Then rose an immense shout; Price, by one supreme effort, had, so to speak, thrown Nana on, and Spirit was beaten by a head's length. The yells of the crowd were something superhuman. Nana! Nana! Nana! was the cry which swelled and echoed from the depths of the woods to Mont Valérien—from the meadows of Longchamps to the plain of Boulogne.

"Long live Nana! Long live France! Down with England!"

The women brandished their umbrellas; the men waved their hats and handkerchiefs; the tribunes were all astir, and even the Empress looked moved.

Then Nana, standing on the seat of her landau, fancied that it was she who was thus applauded. She was stunned, as it were, by this great victory, and gazed with unseeing eyes on the surging crowd, bowing down before the new Nana who was bearing off Price, now a limp rag. She clapped her hands wildly.

"It is I!" she cried. "What luck! what luck!"

And, not knowing in what words to translate the joy she felt, she kissed Louis, who was still sitting on Bordenave's shoulder.

"Three minutes and fourteen seconds," said that individual, as he put his watch back into his pocket.

Nana listened to her name still reverberating over the plain. It was her people who were clamoring at her feet, while she overlooked them, with her hair streaming in the wind, and her white and blue dress, the color of the sky. Labordette had just told her that she had won two thousand louis, for he had placed her fifty louis on Nana at forty. But the money was less dear to her than this unexpected victory, which made her Queen of Paris. Her women friends were furious, for they had lost everything.

Rose Mignon, in a spasm of rage, had broken her umbrella; and Caroline Héquet and Clarisse, with Simonne and Lucy Stewart also, in spite of her son, were loud in their expressions of indignation; while La Tricon straightened herself up in her pride at having so correctly measured the capacities of the winning colt.

The men around the landau were hoarse with shouting, but Georges kept up the applause, and continued to call "Nana" in a voice that was gradually growing weak. La Faloise declared that he had foreseen it all from the beginning. As the champagne was gone, Philippe, with the footmen, went to the stands to see what could be found there. Nana's court was constantly becoming more numerous; her triumph decided those, who had hitherto hung back, to approach with outstretched hands. Her carriage had become the centre of attraction. She, the Goddess—Venus, Queen of Love, was surrounded by her humble slaves. Bordenave, behind her, swore under his breath, but was in reality as gratified as if he had been her father. When the champagne arrived and she lifted her overflowing glass, the applause began again.

"Nana! Nana! Nana!" The astonished crowd looked around for the colt, and no one knew whether it was the animal or the woman, that awoke all this clamor.

Steiner, entirely carried away, left Simonne, and climbed upon one of the wheels of the carriage to press Nana's hand. Mignon, too, did the same, notwithstanding his wife's angry looks. He kissed her paternally on both cheeks, and said, in a low voice:

"I am sure she will send that letter now. She is in a perfect rage."

He spoke of his wife. Nana unwarily answered:

"So much the better—that will suit me!"

But, seeing his astonishment, she hastily continued:

"No, I don't mean that! The fact is, I don't know what I am saying. I think I am a little upset."

She was indeed upset—elated with joy, elated with sunshine—and, waving her glass, she shouted:

"Let us drink to Nana! To Nana!" and her clear voice rang above all the loud laughter and the applause about her.

The races were over, and the carriages were beginning to leave the Hippodrome. By this time a dismal rumor was buzzed about. Vandeuvres' name was heard on all sides. The facts were clear—for two years he had been leading up to this by ordering Gresham to keep Nana back, and he had used Lusignan only to keep up the delusion. The losers were furious, while those who had won shrugged their shoulders. After all, where was the harm? Had not a man the right to manage his stable as he pleased? The same thing had been done repeatedly. Most persons, on the whole, thought Vandeuvres had done well to take all the bets he could on Nana; two or three million louis were spoken of with bated breath—twelve hundred thousand francs at the very least—a sum whose magnitude inspired both respect and indulgence.

But other reports graver still began to be whispered, and finally a frightful scandal was openly bruited about. Poor Vandeuvres was done for. He had made his magnificent coup, but had committed the excessive folly of betting two thousand louis against Lusignan through Maréchal, with the hope of covering the losses he should incur by the bets he openly made. This was most idiotic, and proved that his head had lost its steadiness. The book-maker, warned that Lusignan would not win, had realized some sixty thousand francs. Unfortunately Labordette, knowing nothing of this, went to him to place two hundred louis on Nana, which the book-maker continued to give at fifty, not suspecting the real coup, of which Vandeuvres deemed it wiser not to speak. When Maréchal realized that he had thus lost one hundred thousand francs by this manœuvre he was furious, and made a frightful scene in front of the weighing room, telling the whole story with brutal frankness. It was said that there was to be an examination.

Nana heard all this, but she did not drink any less champagne nor cease laughing. Labordette at this moment approached; he was very pale.

"Well?" she said, in a low voice.

"Ruined!" he answered, shrugging his shoulders. "This Vandeuvres had no sense whatever."

She raised her eyebrows with a look of ennui.

CHAPTER XVII.

MABILLE.

ONE evening at Mabille Nana made a tremendous sensation. When she appeared about ten o'clock the crowd was immense. This celebrated resort of fashion and gallantry was wild with excitement. The ball-room blazed with gas; black-coated men, and women in shabby dresses, only fit to be torn in the crowd, and excessively décolletée, pushed their way along; jests, foolish words, originating no one knew with whom, were repeated from person to person with shouts of laughter. No one danced, for the orchestra could not be heard thirty feet away. In the midst of all this confusion Nana arrived in the toilet she had worn at the races—blue and white. She was greeted with wild bravos, and borne in triumph by three men about the room and through the garden.

It was not until Tuesday that Nana recovered from the excitement of her triumph. She had been talking with Madame Lerat, who had come to give her some news of little Louis, who had taken cold at the races and was seriously ill. All Paris was talking of Vandeuvres, who was excluded from the race-grounds and dismissed from the *Cercle Impérial*, and had fired his stables with all his horses therein.

"He told me he would do it," said Nana. "The man was crazy! I had a terrible shock though when I heard about it last evening; for, you see, a man that would do such a thing as that might have assassinated me any time. And then why didn't he give me a chance to make my fortune on the colt? He told Labordette that if I had known anything about it I would certainly have informed my hair-dresser and a crowd of other men! That was a polite thing to say, wasn't it? No, indeed, I don't feel that I have any great reason to regret him very deeply."

The more she thought about the matter the more indignant she became. Labordette appeared; he had straight

ened out his betting-book and had made about forty thousand francs. This information naturally augmented her ill-humor, for she might have easily made a million. Labordette, who pretended utter innocence throughout the affair, threw Vandeuvres over absolutely.

"These old families," he said, "had died out, and it was just as well that their effete descendants should perish—the manner of their going mattered little."

"But it was rather a nice thing for him to do," said Nana, "to set fire to his stables and perish in the flames. I don't defend his course with Maréchal, for it was simply imbecile. Just think of it. Blanche says I am to blame for it all. I told her right out, in so many words, that I had never bidden him steal for me! Can't a woman ask a man for money without pushing him toward a crime? If he had said to me, 'I haven't a sou,' I should have answered, 'All right; then we must part,' and that would have been the end of it."

"Unquestionably," her aunt had answered, with entire gravity. "If men will be so obstinate, it is always the worse for them in the end."

"But the ending was fine!" repeated Nana. "I shall always say that; but I shudder every time I think of it. He sent every one away, and had some petroleum, and I am told that the flames were magnificent. The horses, though, did not choose to be roasted. They were heard neighing and screaming, and they threw themselves against the door with cries like human beings. It must have been awful!"

Labordette lifted his eyebrows incredulously. He did not believe in the death of Vandeuvres. Some one declared he had been seen escaping by the window. He had lighted the flames in a momentary aberration of mind, and then came to his senses.

Nana listened with regret, and could only say in reply: "Oh! it is too bad! He was such a handsome fellow—"

CHAPTER XVIII

AFRAID TO DIE.

IT was one o'clock in the morning. Nana and the Count were standing beside the curtains of Point de Venice. He had returned to her after sulking four days. The room was dimly lighted by a night-lamp in the corner. There was a long, low sigh—both were disturbed, and Nana glided from his side, leaving her friend in the shadow of the curtains.

"Is there a Heaven and a Hell?" she asked, standing by his side and looking full upon him, her face pale with superstitious fear—although she had, a few moments before, been altogether unconcerned.

She had not been well all day, and all sorts of stupid ideas—as she called ideas about Death, ideas about Heaven and Hell—had been running in her head.

Very often she was timid at night, and shaken by imaginary terrors. She saw hideous things in the corners, and was unwilling to be left alone.

"I am quite sure that I shall not go to Heaven," she continued. "Will you tell me where I shall go?" she gasped, shivering from head to foot as she spoke,—"Tell me!" she repeated, imploringly.

The Count, amazed at these singular questions, addressed to him at such a time, felt that fear of God and remorse which, as a strong Catholic, preyed upon him, sought to calm her. She threw herself into his arms and clung to his neck in a paroxysm of terror, and, amid convulsive sobs, she exclaimed:

"I am afraid to die! I am afraid to die!"

With difficulty he disengaged himself. He dreaded lest this contagious terror should attack him also—this terror of the Invisible. He told her that she had committed no great sins in this world, and might be sure of forgiveness. She seated herself on the side of a chair and listened, but with an occasional shake of the head in

dissent. No, she had done no harm to any one, and she always wore a medal of the Virgin. She showed it to him as she spoke—hanging down from her neck—only this is not enough. She knew very well that women who lived the life she did went to Hell. Scattered sentences from her Catechism came back to her. Ah! if she had only been properly taught—and if the Priests were not so stupid! She kissed her medal with fervor, as if it were a charm against Death—the very thought of which chilled her to the heart.

She made Muffat go into the dressing-room with her, because she was afraid to stay there alone, even with the door open. She asked him to look into all the corners and behind the curtains, and started at every sound. When he ended his search, she went to the mirror, and stood looking at herself fixedly, her face growing whiter and whiter.

She pressed her two hands on her cheek bones and drew the flesh tightly over them.

"A woman is very ugly when she is dead," she said, slowly.

And she opened her eyes wide, and dropped her jaw, to see how she would look.

"Look at me," she continued, turning this disfigured face to Muffat. "I think I have a very small head."

Then the Count became angry.

"You are crazy," he said.

He had seen her, though—seen that face as it might look after being buried for years, and his hands were clasped as he breathed a frightened prayer. Religion had regained her power over him of late, and between his penitence and his fears he was ground into dust. He wrung his hands and groaned:

"My God! My God!"

It was the cry of his helplessness; the cry of his sin, which he had no strength to resist, notwithstanding his conviction that eternal damnation would follow.

When Nana returned to him, she found him white and haggard, his nails buried in his flesh, and his eyes raised despairingly to heaven. She began to sob with him, and they shuddered together without knowing why or at

what. He had passed more than one similar night, but this time Nana thought it not idiotic, for she was really afraid. Suddenly she asked herself if it might not be that Rose Mignon had sent him that famous letter, but she soon discovered she was mistaken in her suspicion.

Two days after this, after a new absence, Muffat appeared one morning at an hour when he never came. He was perfectly livid. His eyes were red, and he was still painfully agitated. But Zoé met him in such fright herself that she did not notice him. She cried out:

"Ah, Monsieur—come in. Poor Madame came near dying last night."

And when he asked for particulars, she told him that Nana had been in a delicate condition for three months and had been very ill.

It was true. Nana had not chosen to believe the truth, and the doctor himself was in doubt for a time, and when he finally told her that such was the case, she was positively angry. Her nervous fears and her fits of gloom and ill temper arose from this secret, undoubtedly—this secret which she guarded with such jealous care. It seemed to her that every one would laugh at her. Nature exasperated her. This maternity interfered with her. This life given amid all the death she sowed about her was a painful surprise to her. She did not want to be bothered with the child. No one would claim it. It would be in every one's way, and would certainly find little pleasure in existence. Meanwhile Zoé was telling the Count what had happened. The Hôtel was turned upside down. The servants were hurrying to and fro. As evening came on the habitués of the house appeared, and Georges told them the story. Each in turn exclaimed "Impossible!" and then became very serious, and looked inquisitively from one to the other. At last they all went away on tiptoe as quietly as if from a chamber of death.

"Come up, sir, if you will," said Zoé to Muffat. "Madame is better, and will receive you. We are expecting the doctor every minute. He promised to come back this morning."

Up-stairs Satin lay on a sofa in the salon, smoking a cigarette, with her eyes fixed on the ceiling. She had evinced the most stolid indifference all through the excitement, with occasional flashes of rage. As Zoé passed the sofa, she was saying to the Count, that Madame had been very ill. Satin said:

"Who cares! It will teach her a lesson!"

The two turned in astonishment. Satin had not moved, but, with her eyes still fixed on the ceiling, repeated her words:

"Who cares! It will teach her a lesson!" and she puffed a slender thread of smoke into the air.

"Upon my word, you are a kind-hearted little creature!" said Zoé.

When the femme de chambre showed the Count into the room he perceived the smell of ether. Nana lay very white among her pillows. She smiled without lifting her head.

"Ah!" she said, "I thought I should never see you again!"

Then, as he leaned over her to kiss her on her cheek, she began to speak of the child, as if he were the father.

"I did not dare to tell you—I was so happy, though! and I had such dreams of the Future. I meant him to grow up worthy of you. And now it is all over; but I tell myself perhaps it is for the best—it would have greatly complicated your life."

He, much astonished at this unexpected paternity, had as yet not found his voice. He had drawn a chair close to the side of the bed, and leaned one arm upon it. Then Nana noticed his disturbed countenance, the bloodshot eyes and trembling lips.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "Are you ill too?"

"No, indeed," he replied, slowly.

She looked at him searchingly, and then sent Zoé, who was arranging some bottles, out of the room. And when she was alone with him, she slipped her arm around his neck and drew his head down to hers. "What has gone wrong, chéri? I can read some trouble in your eyes. Did you not come here to tell me something?"

"No, no," he replied, earnestly.

But, worn out by suffering, touched by this sick-room in which he so unexpectedly found himself, the Count broke down completely. He buried his face among the pillows to drown his sobs. Nana understood at once —Rose Mignon had certainly sent the letter! She allowed him to weep for a few moments without speaking, and then, in a tone of maternal compassion, she said:

"You have difficulties at home?"

He nodded assent; and she, after a long pause, said, in a low whisper:

"You know all, then?"

Again he silently assented. There was not a sound in the darkened room. It was the night before, on returning from an Impérial soirée, that he had received the letter written by Sabine to her friend. After a night of agony passed in dreams of revenge, he left his home, lest, if he remained there, he should kill his wife. Soothed by the dewy sweetness of the June morning, he had taken his way mechanically to Nana, as he had always done in the most critical hours of his life. With her he hoped for consolation.

"Calm yourself," she murmured. "I have known it a long time. But I did not care to be the one to open your eyes. You remember that last year you had some suspicion. Then for lack of proof, and a little owing to me, the affair blew over."

He lifted his head. It was difficult for him to express himself in words now, although for a long time he had been in the habit of discussing with her all his affairs in the most open way. She encouraged him. She was a woman, and wished to hear all. He began, then stopped.

"You are ill," he said; "I must not weary you. I am going now."

"No," she answered, "you must stay. I, very likely, may be able to give you some good advice. But the doctor told me not to talk."

He rose, and began to walk up and down the room, and she questioned him.

"What are you going to do?"

"I intend to castigate this man."

She shook her head.

"No; that will not do. And your wife?"

"I shall take her into court. I have all the proof I require."

"You must not. I will never allow you to do that!" And in a low, faint voice she pointed out to him the useless scandal of a duel and a divorce suit. For a week he would be in all the papers, he would throw away his peace and his high position at Court, and his honorable name—and for what? simply that people might laugh at him.

"What do I care?" he cried. "I shall be avenged."

"My dear," she said slowly, "when a man does not avenge himself at once in such cases, he never avenges himself at all!"

He halted in his long strides through the salon. He was not a coward, but he felt that she was right. She struck a second blow:

"Do you know what disturbs me, my dear friend?" she said. "It is that you are deceiving your wife all this time. What reproaches, then, can you make to her? Your wife unquestionably knows this fact. She will say that you set the example, and then your lips will be closed. I am inclined to think, chéri, that it is better for you that you are here, with me, instead of killing them."

He dropped into his chair, overwhelmed by these frank words, which seemed to him the voice of his own conscience. She relapsed into silence, and then said softly:

"Help me, dear; put me up a little on my pillows. I have slipped way down in the bed, and my head is too low."

When he had done what she asked, she drew a long breath of relief, and went on to speak of the interest Paris would feel in the suit he would bring against his wife. The Countess would employ a lawyer, and this lawyer would speak of Nana. Everything that she had ever done in her life would be recounted: her appearance at the Variétés, her Hôtel and her life,—and she certainly would not like that, though all the women of her acquaintance would be greatly pleased, of course.

She had again drawn his head down to her pillow, and she whispered in his ear:

"Listen, dear. You must be reconciled with your wife—"

But he rebelled at this. Never! It was too utterly shameful. She insisted, however, but with great tenderness:

"You must be reconciled with your wife. I ask it of you in the name of our love. You must do it for my sake. I do not wish to hear it said that it is I who have taken you from your home—it would give me too vile a name. What would be thought of me? No, you and your wife must be friends again, completely and entirely,—you understand. Only, you must promise me that you will love me forever, because—"

Tears choked her. He interrupted her by kisses, and said:

"No, no; it is impossible!"

"Yes, yes," she answered. "I insist, after all, that she is your wife, and it is not as if you deceived me for the first one who came. And Duty before all,—is it not so? Is there any other way of bringing your wife again into the strait and narrow path? I beg of you to do me this favor."

She talked in this way until her strength was exhausted, giving him the best possible advice. She even spoke of God and Heaven. He might have thought her to be Monsieur Vénot, when the old man read him a sermon with the hope of turning him from sin.

She, however, did not speak of a rupture. She preached of complaisance, of good-natured blindness on the part of both husband and wife; kindly feelings between herself and the wife; peace and quiet—something like a happy sleep amid the inevitable annoyances of life.

This would in no way change their lives. He would still be preferred by her to all other men; only he would not come to her quite so often, and would spend more time with the Countess. Thus everything disagreeable would be avoided. The world would not gossip; the Countess would not be made unhappy; and a sponge would be passed over this miserable affair which had given every-

body so much trouble. She drew a long breath as she finished, and then added, in a faint voice:

"My conscience will be appeased. I shall feel that I have done a good action. You will love me all the more."

Then came a long silence. She had closed her eyes and become very pale. Muffat was silent, saying to himself that he must not excite her. After a few minutes she opened her eyes again. She murmured:

"But the money? Where will you get money if you quarrel now? Labordette came yesterday about the note. Besides I need everything. I literally have nothing to put on."

Her eyes closed; she lay as if dead. Muffat's features contracted with absolute anguish. In this last great blow he had forgotten—totally forgotten—his financial difficulties, from which he saw no way of escape. Notwithstanding the distinct promises he had received, the note for a hundred thousand francs, which had been once renewed, had been put into circulation, and Labordette affecting utter despair, had thrown all the blame on Francis, and declared that never again would he have any business relations with a man so inferior in education and in position. This note must be paid. The Count, of course, would never allow it to be protested.

There were, besides Nana's exactions, a constant drain upon him in other ways. When the Countess returned from Fondettes, she had suddenly burst out in all sorts of extravagances, and evinced a passion for luxury, which had been hitherto totally unsuspected by her husband. Society stood aghast at her caprices, and at the new footing on which her house was established. Five hundred thousand francs were spent in the alterations and furnishing of the old Hôtel Merosmesnil; vast sums melted away—utterly disappeared; spent on her toilette, and probably given away; she did not condescend to render any account. Twice Muffat began to question her, but her manner was so singular, her smile so very unpleasant, that he did not venture on further interference, for fear of some words on her part to which he could make no reply. He, who was ruining himself in the Avenue de Villiers, felt that he had no strength to arrest this other ruin going

on at his own fireside. Both husband and wife were devouring their fortune at the two ends—things, in fact, had arrived at such a point that the Count, on accepting Daguenet from Nana's hand, reduced Estelle's dowry to two hundred thousand francs, to which the young man, elated as he was by his unexpected success, made no objection.

After eight days of intolerable anxiety, Muffat decided that there was but one way for him to raise the money necessary to pay this note held by Labordette—and that was to sell Les Bordes, a magnificent estate valued at half a million, bequeathed to the Countess by an uncle. To do this, however, her signature was necessary. By their marriage contract she herself could not alienate any of her property without his consent. He had determined to speak of this signature to his wife, but now this could not be done, for, of course, it would be impossible for him to accept this expedient.

Nana, when she alluded to money, had made his wound bleed anew. He perfectly well understood what she meant, for he had been unwise enough—contemptible enough—to tell her the precise condition of things, and to speak to her of his annoyance in the matter of this signature.

Nana, however, did not seem inclined to persist. She did not open her eyes again. Seeing her so pale, he was frightened, and hastily offered her the bottle of ether. She sighed and said, without, however, mentioning Daguenet's name:

"And when does the marriage take place?"

"The contract is to be signed in five days—on Tuesday," he replied.

Then, still with her eyes closed, as if it were night, and she was thinking aloud, she said:

"Of course, you see what you have to do. As for me, I only wish to see every one contented."

He soothed her, as best he could. He saw that she needed rest. He rebelled no more. This darkened room, with its faint smell of ether, had, by degrees, lulled him into a feeling that quiet was the best thing in the world. His rage against his wife died away in the presence of this pale face which he so adored. He pressed his lips to her

forehead, while a faint smile of victory flitted over her face.

But Dr. Tavernier appeared.

"And how is the dear creature?" he said, familiarly, to Muffat, whom he treated as the husband and master of the house. "She has had trouble, but we will soon bring her round again."

The doctor was a handsome man, of about thirty-five, and had a magnificent clientèle in the world of gallantry. Always cheerful and on friendly terms with these ladies, he sent them in enormous bills, and exacted strict payment. Nana sent for him two or three times each week, always trembling at the idea of Death, and confiding to him some trifling ailment which he laughed at and cured; but this was of more consequence.

"When do you think she will be up again?"

"Oh, not for a fortnight; but you need not be anxious."

Muffat was about to leave, feeling very sad at seeing his poor Nana so ill. She recalled him and extended her hand, and said softly, with a tenderly threatening air:

"You know what I said, and I meant it. I will not receive you again, unless you make peace with your wife."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE COUNTESS SABINE'S BALL.

THE Countess Sabine wished her daughter's contract to be signed on Tuesday, to inaugurate by a fête the restoration of the Hôtel, whose painted walls were as yet hardly dry. Five hundred invitations were issued; all circles were represented. That very morning the upholsterers put up the curtains, and just as the chandeliers were lighted at nine o'clock, the architect, accompanied by the Countess, gave his final directions. It was one of those spring fetes which have a charm of their own. The warm June evening allowed the doors into the garden to be left wide open, and the dancing even extended to the lawn. When the first guests arrived and were received by the Count and the Countess, they were struck dumb by amazement. They could with difficulty recall the salon with which they had been familiar—that antique apartment with its atmosphere of religious severity, its massive mahogany furniture and hanging of yellow velvet, and its ceiling stained with dampness. Now, from the entrance, the floors were exquisitely inlaid, and the marble stairs protected by beautifully carved railings. The salon was hung with Genoa velvet, drawn up in the centre of the ceiling by an enormous decoration by Boucher, for which the architect nad paid one hundred thousand francs when the Château de Vaucham was sold. Lustres blazed and mirrors reflected the light that fell on all sorts of rare and precious things. It seemed as if the Countess were now seeking, by excess of light, to make amends for the obscurity in which so much of her life had been spent. It was as if the one luxurious chair—Sabine's own—had been enlarged until it filled the whole Hôtel with enervating indolence.

The orchestra was placed in the garden, by an open window. They played a waltz, whose rhythm floated over the salon and the garden, which last was lighted with

Venetian lanterns. In the centre of the lawn was a tent where the supper tables were spread. This waltz was the one whose melody ran through *La Blonde Venus* and filled the Hôtel with its gay rhythm. It was as if some deadly wind came in from the street, and swept away all the dead Past from out the haughty dwelling, carrying away with it the honor and the faith of the Muffat family.

The old friends of the Count's mother gathered together near the chimney, feeling dazzled and out of place. They formed a little group apart from the others. Madame du Joncquoy went into the dining-room, where she saw not one familiar thing. Madame Chantereau looked with utter stupefaction into the garden, which seemed to her to be double its former size. Very soon they began to murmur among themselves, and some very bitter things were said.

"What would the Comtesse say, were she to come to life again?" exclaimed Madame Chantereau. "Think of her face, were she to walk in and look at these people! Just think, too, of the money that must have been spent! It is perfectly scandalous!"

"Sabine is mad!" answered Madame du Joncquoy. "Did you notice her at the door? But you can see her from here. She wears all her diamonds."

The two ladies rose from their chairs, and examined the Comtesse, who wore white and a quantity of superb English point. She was marvellously lovely, youthful, and gay, with a perpetual smile. Near her stood the Count, smiling also, but very pale and very quiet.

"Well! well! who would have thought it?" resumed Madame Chantereau. "I remember the day when he was so absolutely master here, that she would not have ventured to buy a footstool without his permission. I never saw any one so changed in my life, as Sabine. Do you remember once that she refused to have her salon done over? and now she has had the whole hôtel, from attic to cellar, utterly transformed!"

They relapsed into silence as Madame de Chézelles passed with several young men, who were admiring everything.

"Delicious!" "Exquisite!" "Such perfect taste!"

She answered, over her shoulder:

"What did I tell you? There is nothing so superb as one of these old houses newly decorated, particularly if no expense has been spared!"

The two old ladies seated themselves again, and began to talk, in subdued voices, of this marriage which astonished every one so much. Estelle had just passed them, in her robe of pale, rose-colored silk, her face as calm and impassive as ever, and her figure quite as thin and stiff. She had accepted Daguenet with indifference, seeming to feel neither joy nor sorrow—as cold and as white as on those wintry evenings, when she had placed an extra log on the fire. All this fête, though given for her,—these lights and flowers—this music,—left her unmoved.

"An adventurer, I am told," whispered Madame de Chantereau. "I don't even know him by sight."

"Hush! there he is!" answered Madame du Joncquoy, with her lips close to her friend's ear.

Daguenet, who had seen Madame Hujon come in with her two sons, hurried toward her to offer his arm. He accosted her almost with tenderness, as if gratitude were, in a measure, due to her for his good fortune.

"Thank you," she said, as she seated herself in the corner by the mantel. "Do you know that you have placed me in my old seat?"

"You know him, then?" asked Madame du Joncquoy, when Duguenet left her.

"Certainly, and a charming young man he is, too! Georges is very fond of him. He belongs to an excellent family."

And the good lady proceeded to defend him against the hostility which she intuitively felt. His father, she said, had been a Préfect under Louis Philippe, and was much beloved by that monarch. He had been possibly a little dissipated, and was said to have lost everything, but a rich uncle would leave him a handsome fortune. Her hearers shook their heads doubtfully, while Madame Hujon reiterated again and again her assertion that his family was a most honorable one. She then went on to complain of fatigue, and said she had been living for a month in La Rue Richelieu, much occupied by business; and a shade of sadness was perceptible in her smile.

But Madame Chantereau returned to the marriage.

"It is really very singular," she said; "Estelle had a right to a much more distinguished marriage."

There was a movement among the crowd; a place was being made for a quadrille. Light dresses floated by amid black-coated men, while jewels flashed, and plumes waved, lace shimmered and flowers trembled on their stalks. It was very warm, and ladies seated against the walls were using their fans freely. Guests were constantly arriving announced by the valets, and men with tired women on their arms, were vainly looking for chairs. Floods of rich tissues and laces blocked the doorways; every one was politely resigned, and thus kept up the fiction of enjoyment. Through the garden flitted airy figures, moving to the rhythm of the music.

Steiner had just met La Foucarmont and La Faloise, and stood drinking a glass of champagne before the buffet.

"It is immensely *chic*," said La Faloise, looking up at the tent of violet silk, drawn on gilt arrows. "It looks like the gilt gingerbread at a Fair. Yes, that is just it—a Fair and gilt gingerbread!"

La Faloise now sneered at everything, adopting the rôle of a young man who had seen all that life could give, and realized most fully its worthlessness.

"What would poor Vandeuvres think, were he to appear?" said Foucarmont. "You remember how he used to mope in front of that chimney? He nearly died of the dulness of this house."

"For heaven's sake, don't talk of Vandeuvres!" said La Faloise. "He was a selfish fellow, and his very name had best be forgotten!"

"Did you see Nana come in?" said Steiner. "Oh! such an entrée as it was. She embraced the Comtesse, and, when the newly-engaged pair went up to her, she blessed them and said to Paul: 'You must thank me for this!' And you did not see it? It was the most magnificent thing of the season!"

The two others listened to him in open-mouthed astonishment, and then began to laugh. He was enchanted with his joke.

"I think you believed me for a moment. But I assure

you it was Nana that made the match, and she ought to have been here if she is not! Besides, is she not in the family?"

The Hujon brothers were approaching and he checked himself; but presently they all began to talk freely. Georges lost his temper with Steiner, who, he said, was too fond of gossip. But Steiner insisted that Nana had made Muffat accept one of her old friends as a son-in-law. Philippe calmed his brother, and the men left the buffet and strolled down the garden-walk. La Faloise stared at all the women as if he had been at Mabille. He met Léonide de Chézelles and laughed and talked loudly with her. They encountered Monsieur Vénot at the end of a winding path in solemn conference with Daguenet. This was, in their eyes, a great joke—he was confessing the young man, probably. The men then went back to the salon, or rather stood just outside looking in.

"By Jove!" said La Faloise, "it must be pretty warm in there."

They half closed their eyes, for the light was dazzling, coming in, as they had, from the darkness of the garden; but they caught sight, nevertheless, of the Marquis de Chouard, whose tall figure towered above the shorter men about him. His face was pale and grave under his scanty white hair. Every one knew that he professed to be so scandalized by the conduct of his son-in-law, that he did not allow his name to be mentioned in his presence, and would not enter the hôtel. If he had consented to appear that evening, it was as a concession to his grand-daughter, for he disapproved of this marriage, and had spoken indignantly of the disorganization of society, and the shameful compromises of the present day.

"The end can't be far off," said Madame du Joncquoy in Madame Chantereau's ear. "This *fille*, they say, has bewitched this unhappy Count; and we have always thought him so noble and so good. His mother would have died of it."

"Yes, he is ruining himself," answered Madame Chantereau. "My husband has a note of his in his hands. Do you know that he lives entirely in the Avenue de Villiers now? All Paris is talking about it. I have no

excuse to offer for Sabine, although I know that he has given her much reason for complaint, but her extravagance is unequalled, she throws her money out of the window."

"It is not money alone that she is throwing away," the other lady said, sadly; "they are both plunging head over heels into folly, my dear."

A gentle voice interrupted them. It was Monsieur Vénot, who had quietly seated himself behind them. He had heard what they had said, and murmured softly:

"Why so despairing? God often manifests Himself when to human eyes all is lost."

His smile displayed his bad teeth. He was quietly looking at the downfall of this house which he for so long a time had ruled. He had probably felt, after the death of the Countess, and the escape of Muffat and Sabine from his hands, that only some tremendous catastrophe could place them again under his control. After his sojourn at Fondettes, he, therefore, ceased to struggle, calmly biding his time, accepting everything: the Count's mad passion for Nana, Fauchéry's devotion to the Countess, and, finally, Estelle's marriage to Daguenet. In all these things he saw his way to power; he was more assiduous than ever, quieter and more mysterious, knowing well that great disorder of life ultimately tends very often to greater devotion.

"I assure you," he continued, in a low voice, "that our friend is always guided by the deepest religious fervor, he has given me the most convincing proofs of this If sometimes his common sense fails him, and his reason is perverted, it is only another proof sent by heaven itself--"

"Well!" interrupted Madame du Joncquoy. "In my opinion he ought first to be reconciled with his wife."

"Unquestionably; and I trust this reconciliation will take place before long."

The two old ladies questioned him still further, but he became very humble, and said that only Heaven could point out the way. All that he himself wished was to avoid public scandal. Religion would tolerate weakness so long as *les convenances* were respected.

"But," said Madame du Joncquoy, "how comes it that you, whose voice certainly has a right to be heard in this

house, have not tried to prevent poor Estelle from falling a prey to this adventurer?"

The little old man assumed an air of the greatest surprise.

"An adventurer?" he repeated, "I assure you that you are laboring under the greatest misconception. Monsieur Daguenet is a most meritorious young man, I know him thoroughly. He is desirous to live a new life, and in Estelle he will find a true guide!"

"Oh! Estelle!" murmured Madame Chantereau, disdainfully. "I think that the dear child never formed a wish of her own in her life. She is thoroughly insignificant."

These words brought a smile to Monsieur Vénot's lips, but he did not see fit to express his opinion of the bride. He felt, indeed, that he had said too much already, and therefore dropped his eyelids, and sat in the obscurity of his corner, behind all these ladies. Madame Hujon, who had listened in silence, said to the Marquis de Chouard, when he came up to pay his respects:

"These ladies are too severe. Life is a hard thing for almost every one. Do you not think, my friend, that we ought to pardon a great deal to others, if we ourselves wish to be forgiven?"

The Marquis was considerably annoyed for a moment. He feared there was more meaning in her words than appeared on the surface. But the good lady's smile was so sad, that he presently recovered and said:

"There are faults that should never be excused. It is by forgiving such that we reach the edge of the abyss. We owe an example—"

Madame Hujon checked him with uplifted hand.

"I forgot, my friend, that you were so very good yourself. But this is dismal talk for a ball-room; and I wish every one to be gay, for gayety and youth are two beautiful things."

The ball was becoming more and more animated. The old hôtel seemed to thrill with the fête as the floor vibrated to the measured step of the dancers.

Occasionally a fair woman's face would flash out from the crowd as she danced—her eyes bright and her lips half parted with enjoyment. The heat was intense and

Madame du Joncquoy declared that there was no sense in it. It was utter nonsense to pile five hundred persons into rooms that could hold only two hundred with comfort. It would have been better to sign the contract in La Place du Carrousel.

"It is another evidence of the bad manners of the present day," said Madame Chantereau. "Once, such occasions were regarded as so solemn that only relatives were present; but now, if the salons were not crowded—if the whole world were not invited, then the soirée is pronounced cold and dull."

"People wish to parade their luxury; to show their wealth, and to bring together all the scum of Paris; it is therefore only natural that homes and households should be demoralized. As for themselves," these ladies went on to say, "they did not know fifty people in the room. Where on earth did they all come from? Who were they?" Young girls in low-necked dresses! One woman had a gold dagger planted in her chignon, while her form was encased in jet embroidery, like a coat of mail. Another wore such clinging skirts that every line of her figure was plainly defined; this was especially noticeable after the bouffante drapery of the previous season. All the world of pleasure was represented there. All those persons whom a tolerant mistress of a house gathers together—where great names and great shames elbow each other, alike carried away by the same thirst for pleasure.

"A most stylish creature is this same Countess," said La Faloise; "she looks ten years younger than her daughter."

Fauchéry appeared at that moment. As a habitué of the house he had taken the liberty of going through the dining-room to avoid the crowd. Rose had taken possession of him in the beginning of the winter and he divided his time between the singer and the Countess, weary of both, and undecided which to leave. Sabine flattered his vanity, but he found Rose infinitely more amusing. In reality, the little woman had a true passion for him, and all a wife's tenderness, which fact was clear to Mignon, and at which he was none too well pleased.

Fauchéry shook hands with the Hujons, with Foucar-

mont and with Steiner; they began to talk together. Steiner had stopped to hear how Nana was, and now gave his report. She was better, but had not yet left her room. Then, dropping their voices they asked each other questions in regard to Muffat. He had been seen leaving Nana's house; so their quarrel was made up, and this was why he seemed so happy. Fauchéry, however, looked preoccupied. That morning he had had a scene with Rose, who had told him bluntly that she had sent the letter to the Count, and advised him not to go to the ball. After some hesitation, he had decided to go; but he was nervous, and not quite sure of himself. He was busy wondering what effect Nana's reconciliation with the Count would have.

"What has gone wrong?" said Philippe to him. "You seem to be ill."

"I? Oh, no; not in the least. I have been hard at work, and that is the reason why I come so late."

Then, coldly, with that absolute heroism which often underlies the common tragedies of life, he added:

"I have not yet said good-evening to my host and hostess, and politeness is the first duty of man."

And with a nod, he made his way through the crowd. The valet had ceased to make any announcements, but the Count and Countess still lingered near the door. He joined them, while the little knot of men whom he had left outside the door leading to the garden stood on tiptoe, curious and spiteful, for Nana had gossiped a little.

"The Count has not seen him yet," said Georges. "Wait—he will turn around in a minute. Yes, he has!"

The orchestra was again playing the waltz from *La Blonde Venus*. Fauchéry bowed low before the Countess. She smiled serenely. Then he stood a moment. The Count's back was turned from him. Fauchéry waited, calm and very pale. The Count that night was especially dignified in his manner. When he turned and his eyes fell on the Journalist, he started and drew himself up a little. For some seconds the two men looked at each other, and it was Fauchéry who first extended his hand. Muffat took it very slowly. Sabine stood in front of them, her eyes cast down, a smile on her lips, and the enervating

strains of the waltz from *La Blonde Venus* filling the room.

"It is all going on right," said Steiner.

"Have they each other's hands still?" asked Foucaymont, in surprise.

A sudden recollection brought a sudden flush to Fauchéry's pale cheeks, as Muffat's fingers touched his. He recalled the property room at the theatre. The dull, greenish light, and its shabby bric-à-brac covered with dust. He remembered how the Count had looked, as he stood there, with the egg-cup in his hand, endeavoring to shake off his doubts and suspicions. To-day Muffat no longer doubted. Another corner-stone of his honor had fallen. Then Fauchéry, relieved of his fears and seeing that the good spirits of the Countess were perfectly sincere, felt a strong desire to laugh. The whole situation seemed to him positively droll.

"There she is!" cried La Faloise, under his breath.

He never allowed a joke to drop, if he thought it a good one.

"There is Nana over there. Did you see her come in?"

"Do hold your tongue, idiot!" murmured Philippe.

"I tell you, when that waltz is played she is always on hand. Can't you see her embracing the three—the Countess, the Count and Fauchéry? I declare such family scenes make me sick."

Estelle approached the group.

Fauchéry complimented her while she stood, straight and stiff, in her rustling pink robe, wide open round eyes, with a vague look in them. She glanced at her mother, and then at her father. Daguenet exchanged a cordial pressure of the hand with the Journalist. They all looked tranquil, smiling and content with themselves and each other. A little behind stood Monsieur Vénot, watching them with keen but bland attention, rejoicing in the paths which Providence was opening.

But the strains of the waltz rose higher and higher, dancers floated around the room—through the windows dark figures were seen, momentarily lighted by the red glare from the lanterns. The reserved gayety in which Fauchéry had participated, in that rigid-looking room, had

developed by degrees into the wild excitement and luxury of this fête. Among the drunkards of the Faubourgs, it is the thirst for alcohol that deprives their families of bread, and brings them down to degradation and poverty. Here, amid all this display of wealth, it was this waltz which sounded the knell of an old race; while Nana, though invisible, permeated the ball-room, floating on the cadence of her insidious music.

It was on the day of the marriage at the church that Count Muffat was reconciled to his wife. That evening the Countess was surprised to see him enter her chamber, where he had not been for two years. She recoiled at first, but continued to smile. He was much embarrassed, and she read him a little moral lecture. She said that Religion commanded mutual forgiveness, and they tacitly agreed to preserve their liberty. By degrees they approached business. He was the first to speak of selling Les Bordes. She at once consented. They both needed money. They would divide the proceeds. Their reconciliation thus became complete. Muffat's religious terrors were greatly alleviated.

That day, about two o'clock, Nana was asleep. Zoé knocked at her door. The sweet air of the lovely summer afternoon came in at the open windows, over which the light curtains were drawn. She opened her eyes, and said:

"Who is it?"

Zoé was about to answer, but Daguenet came in and announced himself. Nana half lifted herself from the couch where she lay, and, dismissing the femme de chambre, she said:

"Why, what on earth does this mean? Is not this your wedding-day?"

He, surprised at the obscurity of the room, stood silent for a moment with his hat in his hand, white gloved and white cravated. He answered slowly:

"Yes, it is I."

"What do you want?"

"I have come to you for your congratulations and your advice."

She extended both hands to him:

"Ah! you thought of me, then? Even in the church perhaps. Well, I am glad to see you again—it may be for the last time!"

They talked and jested. The breeze filled the lace curtains like sails, and the voices of children at play on the Avenue were heard.

Daguenet returned to the Muffat Hôtel for lunch, and then he and his wife departed on their wedding-journey.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SHADOW OF THE END.

IN the beginning of the winter, Comte Muffat, who was to have accompanied Nana to a fancy ball, came just at twilight to tell her, that he had received a sudden and unexpected summons to the Tuileries. He found the Hôtel quite dark, and heard the servants laughing in their quarters. He ran lightly up the stairs. Through the stained glass came a soft, rosy light. The door of the salon opened on noiseless hinges. All the beautiful sculptures and paintings were basking in the slumbrous quiet. And there he beheld Nana talking tenderly to Georges. There was no possible denial. He uttered a low cry of agony and stood motionless. Nana started up, and, grasping his arm, drew him into the next room, in order to give Georges time to fly. She did not know what she said. She was also angry with herself for being caught in this way. Such folly as it was, too, to have this scene, for the sake of a schoolboy who could not even buy her a daily bunch of violets, so closely did his mother hold the purse-strings. It was too much. Georges had threatened to kill himself in a paroxysm of jealousy against his brother, and she had only endeavored to soothe him. This would teach her, she thought, never to be so amiable again!

The room into which she had hurried Muffat was perfectly dark. She felt her way to the bell and pulled it violently. It was all Julien's fault. If there had been a lamp in the salon, nothing of this would have happened.

"Do be more reasonable!" she said to the Count, as Zoé lighted the lamp.

The Count was seated with his hands loosely hanging at his side, his eyes fixed on the ground. He trembled from head to foot, shivering with horror. This silent grief touched Nana. She tried to console him.

"Yes, I was wrong—I know it perfectly well. You see I am sorry. I really had no idea that you would take it so much to heart. Now do be good and forgive me."

She was crouching at his feet and clasped her hands as if for pardon. Then, as he became more like himself and drew a long breath, she became more and more coaxing and submissive, and gave a last excuse with all gravity:

"You see, dear child,—can't you understand? I never can be unsympathetic."

The Count allowed himself to be wheedled. He only exacted that Georges should be sent away. He forgave her for the second time. But all illusions were dead, and he longer believed in the fidelity she had so often sworn. The next day Nana deceived him again, and he kept her only because he dreaded the emptiness of life without her. Then his penance began.

It was at this period of her life that Nana especially astonished Paris by her splendor. She displayed to the amazed city the most insolent luxury, and the most absolute contempt for money. Her Hôtel was like a gigantic forge, which melted all the fortunes which came within her reach. She had but to breathe upon gold to transmute it into a fine dust which the wind swept away. Never had such a passion for expenditure been witnessed—a frenzy to possess only to destroy. The Hôtel was a vast abyss, into which men, their names, and their fortunes disappeared, without leaving one trace behind them. This *fille* with the tastes of a parrot, always crunching radishes and pralines, rejecting meat, and emptying pots of sweetmeats, had bills for five thousand francs monthly merely for the table. In the kitchen there was a grand system of pillage. Victorine and François reigned there, and invited their friends whenever, and as many, as they pleased; feeding, beside, a host of relations outside. Julien insisted on a percentage from all the furnishers, to that degree that when a pane of glass was set that cost thirty sous, they were obliged to give him twenty. Charles sold the oats he bought for the horses, and bought twice the amount of fodder they consumed, selling at the rear that which entered the stables by the front door. And, amid this general pillage—of this terrible sack of a town carried by assault—Zoé contrived to conceal the thefts of others that she might the better hide her own.

But there was quite as much wasted as stolen. The food of the previous day was thrown away in the morning: provisions were allowed to spoil; the sugar was piled up in the glasses; the gas burned all the time. Constant negligence and a succession of careless accidents, all hastened the approach of the inevitable ruin of an establishment which was devoured by so many hungry mouths.

In Madame's rooms the same thing went on; robes that cost ten thousand francs were worn once or twice and forgotten, then sold by Zoé; jewels that ceased to please disappeared from the drawers as if they had crumbled away; stupid purchases, the novelties of one day, forgotten the next, were swept into a corner, and finally into the street. Nana could never see anything very expensive without being crazy to have it for her very own; and thus she gathered about her a continual succession of precious trifles and masses of flowers, all the better pleased when her caprice of the hour cost enormously. Nothing remained with her, however; all that she did not break, she ruined in one way or another with her little white hands; a pile of nameless débris, of muddy rags and torn fragments marked her way. Her bills with her tradespeople were enormous—twenty thousand francs to the milliner, thirty thousand at a lingerie establishment, twelve thousand at her boot-maker's; her stable cost her fifty thousand, and in six months she had run up at her dressmaker's a bill amounting to one hundred and twenty thousand francs. Without any increase in her retinue of servants, her expenses, which Labordette had estimated at four hundred thousand francs, reached that year one million, which staggered even herself, and she could in no way understand where a sum of such magnitude had disappeared. All her masculine friends, shovel in the gold as they might, could not fill the enormous cavity which continually yawned in her Hôtel.

Nana was now absorbed in a new caprice. She had for a long time been haunted by a desire to refurnish her sleeping-room; she thought she had at last succeeded in obtaining a good idea. The room was to be hung with velvet, tea-rose in tint, drawn up to the ceiling in the shape of a tent, and trimmed with cords and tassels of gold and

gold lace. This seemed to her both rich and sentimental, and also very becoming to the tone of her complexion. But the room was a mere accessory to the bed, which was a prodigy. Nana dreamed of one such as had never been seen before, one before which all Paris should bow—a Throne and an Altar. It should be of gold and silver, in repoussé work, like a great jewel casket, golden roses thrown in handfuls on a trellis of silver. Exquisitely carved cupids should hold the curtains, and look down with wonder in their eyes. She had talked with Labordette and he had sent her two goldsmiths. The designs were already in progress: the bed would cost fifty thousand francs, and Muffat should give it to her for her New Year's gift. As to the room itself, its decorations would cost thirty thousand francs, and somebody would pay that amount for her, she did not as yet, in the least, know who. Nana was at a loss to understand why it was that in this torrent of gold she was always in want of silver. Some days she was seriously inconvenienced by the need of a few louis. Then she borrowed from Zoé, or she got them as best she could. But before resorting to any extreme measures she extracted from the men in the house every sou they had, literally emptying their pockets even to the sous, with the air of thinking it all an excellent joke. For three months she helped herself in this way from Philippe's pockets, and now, when he came, he left his portemonnaie behind him. At last, becoming bolder, she asked him to lend her two hundred francs or three hundred francs, never more, to pay some small but pressing bills; and Philippe, who was treasurer of his regiment, in July, brought the money the next day, and expressed his regret that he was so poor, for good Madame Hujon treated both her sons with singular severity. At the end of three months, these little loans, so often renewed, amounted to some ten thousand francs. The Captain still retained his rich full laugh, but was beginning to look thin and careworn; a look from Nana transfigured him always however. She intoxicated him with her bewitching glances; and this brought him to her presence whenever he could escape from his military duties.

One evening Nana, having said that she was also named

Thérèse, and that her fête fell on the 15th of October, these gentlemen all sent her cadeaux. Captain Philippe brought his own—an antique drageoir of porcelaine de Saxe, mounted in gold, for which he had paid three hundred francs. He found her alone in her dressing-room, wrapped in her peignoir, examining the presents, which were all placed upon a table. She had already broken a flaçon of rock crystal, in trying to uncork it.

"Oh! you are too good!" she said, as she saw the drageoir; "what is it? oh! show it to me. Are you a child that you should put your money into such things as that!"

She scolded him because she knew him to be poor; but she was none the less pleased at seeing him spend so much for her. This was the only proof of affection for which she cared. She held the drageoir in her hand, examining it all the time to see how it was made, opening it and shutting it.

"Take care," he said; "it is very fragile."

But she shrugged her shoulders. Did he think that she was butter-fingered? And as she spoke the frame-work rested in her hands; but the lid lay shattered at her feet. She stood aghast, saying only:

"Oh! It is broken."

Then she began to laugh. It was so odd to see the fragments scattered over the floor. Her laugh was that of a mischievous, naughty child who takes pleasure in destruction. Philippe was very pale, for Nana little knew the anguish that this trifle had cost him. When she saw how disturbed he was, she tried to control herself.

"It was not my fault. It was cracked. I am sure it was cracked. But did you see how it danced over the floor?"

And she burst into another laugh. But when she saw that the young man's eyes were filled with tears she grew serious.

"How foolish you are!" she exclaimed. "I like you just as much. If things were never broken the shopkeepers would never sell anything! After all, things were made to be broken. Now, look at this fan. Just see how frail it is!"

She snatched a fan and dashed it open. The silk tore

directly in two. This seemed to excite her. To show him that she attached no importance to her other gifts, she, after spoiling his, began to test everything upon the table, and destroyed them one after the other, by way of proving that nothing was solid. A strange light illuminated her vacant eyes; her parted lips showed her white teeth; her flannel dressing-gown set off her white throat and hands. Finally when all was shattered and gone, she, with a brighter color in her cheeks, struck the table with her hand, and, with her nervous laugh, cried out with childish glee:

"We have finished! There is nothing more to break!"

Then Philippe, as much carried away as herself by this thirst for destruction, smiled blandly upon her. She said she had not been as much amused for a long time; and then with her arms hanging, she added, coaxingly:

"Can you bring me ten louis to-morrow, dear? My baker torments me to pay his bill."

He turned very pale, and, looking agitated, said very gravely:

"I will try."

Then came a long silence. He went to the window and pressed his forehead against the cool glass. After some ten minutes he turned around, and said, slowly:

"Nana, you ought to marry me."

This idea struck her as so excessively droll that she sank into a chair to laugh.

"My dear boy," she said, "are you quite out of your head? Because I ask you for ten louis, is that any reason why you should offer me your hand? Never! I love you too well. Would not that be an absurdity?"

And as Zoé came in at that moment they said no more. The femme de chambre instantly saw the condition of the presents upon the table. In a moment or two she asked if she should take away those things. Nana told her, "of course;" Zoé gathered them up in her apron; and presently in the kitchen, the servants were dividing the débris

CHAPTER XXI.

RUIN AND DESPAIR.

THAT day Georges managed to enter the Hôtel. François allowed him to pass, although he knew that Nana had distinctly forbidden the boy to enter her house. He softly entered her room and heard his brother's voice, and the offer of marriage. He was so overwhelmed that he went away with a sensation as of a lump of ice on his brain. But when he reached his own room—which was above his mother's in La Rue Richelieu—he burst into a paroxysm of boyish, passionate sobs. Now there was no longer room for doubt. The idea of Nana marrying Philippe was simply horrible to him. Each time he thought himself calmed down, a new access of rage assailed him, and he threw himself upon his bed with muttered oaths. The whole day passed in this way. He sent word to his mother that he was suffering with a headache and must not be disturbed. But the night was more terrible still. If his brother had been in the house he would certainly have gone to his room and killed him.

When day broke, he made up his mind to kill himself. About ten o'clock he went out—he could not rest. He roamed for hours about Paris, feeling that before he died he must see Nana once more. About three o'clock he went to the Hôtel in the Avenue Villiers.

About noon Madame Hujon had been struck down by a frightful piece of intelligence: Philippe was in prison. He had been arrested the previous evening on the accusation of having stolen twelve thousand francs from the safe belonging to his regiment. For three months he had been appropriating small sums with the hope of repaying them, concealing the deficit by false entries, and this fraud was always successful, in consequence of the carelessness of the other officers. The old lady's first words were a maledic-

tion upon Nana. She knew Philippe's liaison, and her recent sadness was due to her constant fear of a catastrophe, but she had never thought of disgrace, and now she felt that had she not refused him money, he would never have been guilty of this crime. She fell upon a sofa, her limbs struck by paralysis, sobbing at her uselessness, nailed there to die, in the hour of the downfall of their honor. Her only comfort was in thinking of Georges: he was left to her, he could act, and possibly save them.

Then, refusing all help, she dragged herself up the stairs, eager for the sympathy that she knew awaited her there. But she found the room empty, and one of the servants said that Master Georges went out early. She looked around and read the whole story in the disorder of the room. She felt that a new disaster was close at hand. Georges was with that woman. With tragic calmness the poor mother left her house, and went to reclaim her son.

All that morning Nana had had a series of annoyances. First there was the baker, who at nine o'clock appeared with his bill—a poor little bill of one hundred and thirty-three francs, which she could not settle, royal as were her surroundings. It had been presented at least twenty times, and the servants sided with the baker. François said that if he did not make a great scene, Madame would never pay him. Charles told him that he himself would settle a little account of his own which was behind hand, while Victorine advised him to watch for Monsieur, and get the money out of him. Julien, the Maître d'Hôtel, undertook to defend Madame: she was very *chic*, he said; and then the cook declared that he was a little in love with Madame himself, at which he smiled, conceitedly. The cook lost her temper entirely at this, and declared that she loathed such women.

François placed the baker in the vestibule, without warning Madame, who suddenly met him as she was going down to breakfast. He was insolent, but she took the bill and told him to come again at three o'clock. Then he departed, swearing to be punctual and to pay himself in one way or another.

Nana breakfasted with a very poor appetite, and wondered all the time how she was to get rid of the man. At

least ten times she had put away the money for this bill, but each time it had melted away—one day for flowers, the next for a subscription in favor of an old gendarme. She relied on Philippe, and was astonished not to see him appear with the two hundred francs that he had promised. He would certainly come, and then she could pay. It was really most unlucky. The night before she had fitted out Satin once again with at least twelve hundred francs worth of robes and linen, and yet she had not a louis in the world. But the Captain did not make his appearance. About two o'clock, as Nana began to feel very uneasy, Labordette appeared, bringing the designs for the bed. This was quite a diversion, and Nana danced with joy. The designs were spread on a table in the salon, and she examined while Labordette explained them.

"This is the boat," he said; "in the centre is a cluster of full-blown roses; then a wreath of flowers and buds; the foliage will be in green gold and the roses in red. This is the head-board, you see, and these are the cupids climbing upon the silver trellis."

But Nana interrupted him in great delight.

"That little fat cupid in the corner is perfectly lovely. And this one too, he has eyes like a pig!"

She was in a fever of excitement. The goldsmiths had said that no Queen had ever slept in a bed like that. But there was a little difficulty. Labordette showed her two designs for the footboard—one which repeated the boat; the other was Night sleeping, wrapped in her veils, with a watchful faun keeping guard over her in the distance. Labordette said that it was intended to give to Night a resemblance to herself. This idea, wretched as was its taste, delighted her.

"You understand, of course, that you need only pose for the head and shoulders," said Labordette.

She looked at him calmly.

"And why, pray? When a question arises of a work of art I am willing to pose at any time and in any way that the sculptor may consider desirable."

But he interrupted her.

"You understand that this last design will cost twelve hundred francs more than the other—"

"What is that to me?" she asked. "Has not my little Muff plenty of money?"

It was by this pleasing name that she, when among her intimates, designated the Comte Muffat; and these gentlemen would say to her, "Have you seen your little Muff to-day?" or "I thought I should see your little Muff here this evening." She was very cautious, however, not to allow any such familiarity in his presence.

Labordette rolled up the designs as he gave some last explanations. The goldsmiths agreed to give her the bed in six months, on or about Christmas day. Early the next week the sculptor would come about the statuette of Night. As she went out into the vestibule with him, Nana suddenly remembered the baker and said, abruptly:

"Do you happen to have ten louis in your pocket?"

One of Labordette's principles was never to lend money to women. He always made precisely the same answer:

"No, my dear; I have not a sou. Shall I go to your little Muff for you?"

"No; that was unnecessary," she said; two days before, the Count had given her five thousand francs.

No sooner had Labordette gone, than the baker appeared, although it was only half-past two as he seated himself on the bench in the vestibule, swearing loud oaths. Nana listened over the staircase, hidden behind the portière of her boudoir. She turned very pale, and suffered acutely at the amusement of her servants. They were dying of laughter in the kitchen; the coachman was listening in the court-yard; François made every possible excuse for going into the vestibule, and each time had a word of encouragement for the baker. She felt herself alone and deserted, even by her servants. She had an idea of borrowing the hundred and thirty-three francs from Zoé, but she now relinquished it. She already owed her money, and was too proud to risk a refusal. She threw back her head and entered her chamber saying, aloud:

"My dear, you have only yourself to rely upon. You have clever wit and must make use of it to get you out of this difficulty. They shall not crush you yet. Oh, no! Not yet!"

And without ringing for her femme de chambre, she

dressed with feverish haste to go to La Tricon; it was her supreme resource in times of great embarrassment. The old woman always got money for her from the rich Englishmen in Paris, which Nana accepted or declined according to her necessities; and whenever debts pressed she was sure of finding twenty-five louis awaiting her there. She went to La Tricon with as much nonchalance as poor people go to the pawnbroker's.

"He is a mean fellow—this Captain," she murmured, as she tied the strings of her hat with nervous haste. "I should like to know how much dependence is to be placed on men who swear they adore you; they have compelled me to go to this woman."

But as she left her chamber she saw Georges standing in the centre of the salon. She did not notice the waxen pallor of his skin and the sullen fire in his large eyes. She exclaimed, with a sigh of relief:

"Ah! you came from your brother!"

"No," said the boy, growing still paler. She shrugged her shoulders, despairingly.

"What did he want, then? Why did he stand in her path? She was in a hurry," she added, angrily. She turned to the doorway.

"Have you any money?"

"No."

"To be sure! I know that; I was a fool to ask. Never enough to buy a bunch of radishes nor to pay six sous for an omnibus fare; mamma won't allow it! Was there ever such a set of men!"

She ran toward the stairs; he snatched her hand—he wished to speak to her; but she cried out that she had no time to waste, but stood motionless when he said:

"Listen to me! I know that you intend to marry my brother—"

This was so unexpected, and so unspeakably droll to her, that she dropped into a chair, after a moment, and laughed heartily.

"Yes," continued the lad; "and I came to say that you should not marry him! It is I who must be your husband."

She listened, in a stupor of amazement.

"What! you too have come to propose to me? It seems to be a family disease! I never heard such nonsense in all my life! You are mad—I will not marry either of you!"

Georges drew a long breath. He wondered if he had not been mistaken. He began again:

"Will you swear to me that my brother is not your friend?"

"What a bore you are!" cried the woman, impatiently, as she pulled on her gloves. "You were amusing for a moment or two—but to persist in this way when you know I am in a hurry! It is none of your business who my friends may be. Do you pay my bills that you expect me to render you an account of my movements? Yes—your brother is my friend."

He shook her by the arm violently.

"Hush!" he said, "don't say that—don't say that again!"

She gave him a push and released herself.

"Ah! you propose to beat me now, do you? Young man! have the goodness to walk out of that door! I have only allowed you to come here out of the purest good-nature. I mean what I say, and you need not stare at me in that way. It is a very long time since I ceased to take the smallest interest in you. I have always regretted that we were acquainted with each other—it was very silly, and I am not quite sure that it was not wrong on my part."

He listened to her, with agony imprinted on every feature. Each word struck him to the heart; he felt as if he were dying. She did not even perceive his sufferings, and went on, glad to pour out on him all the annoyances of the morning.

'It was exactly like your brother!" she said, angrily. "He promised me two hundred francs this morning, and has not shown his face here. He never gives me money enough to pay for my pomade, any way—but to leave me in such embarrassment is really too much. Stay—let me tell you. Because of your brother's failure to keep his

promise, I am going out now, this minute, to get twenty-five louis."

This was the last blow. He threw himself across the door and implored her with clasped hands.

"No! no!" he cried.

"Very well," she answered. "Have you the money?"

No; he had no money whatever. Never had he felt so miserable, so useless, or so much of a child. He shivered from head to foot. She saw this and was, at last, a little touched. She moved him gently aside.

"I must go, dear. Be reasonable. You are a dear little fellow—but, just now, I am greatly harassed by business matters,—and do not tell your brother what I have just told you. He need never know where I am going. I always tell too much when I am angry."

She laughed; then, drawing him toward her, she kissed him on his brow.

"Good-bye, dear—good-bye forever. It is all over between us two!"

And she left him. He was standing in the centre of the salon. Her last words sounded in his ears like a funeral knell—"Good-bye forever. It is all over between us"—and the earth seemed to quiver beneath his feet. His perturbed brain no longer dwelt on what was in store for Nana. He thought only of Philippe as Nana's friend. He drew a long breath and looked around the room. His eyes were hot and dry. Souvenirs came to him of those nights at La Mignotte, when at first her tenderness was maternal; of stolen meetings in the very room which had witnessed her last words. His brother had taken his place. His brother was a grown man and had a beard, and he was only a child. Now, what was to become of him? He could not live. His love was tempered by infinite tenderness, and he could never forget this woman. The end had come and he wished to die.

The doors all stood wide open. The servants were busily discussing the astonishing fact of Madame's going out on foot. Charles and François were laughing with the baker. Zoé, coming in through the boudoir, asked Georges if he would wait for Madame.

Yes; he would wait—he had forgotten something he wished to say to her.

When the femme de chambre departed he began to look around the room; not finding anything else, he took from the drawer of the dressing-table a pair of long and very pointed scissors which she was in the habit of using during her toilette—to trim her nails and cut her hair. He waited there for an hour—his hand nervously fingering the scissors, which he kept in his pocket.

"There comes Madame," said Zoé, coming into the room again. She had probably been watching for her mistress from the windows of the chamber.

There was a great commotion down-stairs: doors opening and shutting and loud voices. Georges heard Nana pay the baker and dismiss him haughtily. Then she came slowly up the stairs. As she entered she exclaimed:

"What! are you still here? Do you want me to quarrel with you?"

He followed her as she passed through the room to her chamber.

"Nana, will you marry me?"

She closed the door in his face; but he held it in one hand while with the other he took from his pocket the scissors. He, with one quick, sharp blow, stabbed himself in the breast with them.

Nana turned around hastily, with a vague consciousness of a misfortune. When she saw what had happened she was furious.

"He is certainly a little fool!" she cried. "And if I live, those are my scissors. Behave yourself—you wicked boy! Ah! my God—my God!"

She was filled with horror. The boy had fallen on his knees, and, as he did so, struck another blow, after which he fell outstretched on the carpet across the sill of the door. Then she utterly lost her senses and screamed aloud. She dared not step over the body, which prevented her from going in search of help.

"Zoé! Zoé! Come—oh! come quickly! Make him stop. He is such a child. He is killing himself—and in my house, too! Did ever any one hear the like!"

He lay, white as marble, with his eyes closed. There was little or no blood to be seen. She finally made up her mind to step over him as he lay.

An old lady was slowly coming through the boudoir. She recognized Madame Hujon. Unable to explain this apparition, she thought it a spirit, and was terribly frightened. She recoiled, and sank into a chair with her gloved hands upraised. She tried to defend herself, and babbled, in broken words:

"It is not my fault—I swear to you that it is not my fault—he wanted to marry me, and when I said no, he killed himself!"

Madame Hujon, with her pale face and snowy hair, and wearing her trailing widow's garments, slowly approached. She had ceased to think of Georges as the carriage bore her swiftly toward Nana's residence. Philippe filled her mind to the exclusion of all else. Perhaps this woman would be able to give some explanation to the Judge, which would touch his heart. And she thought she would entreat her to offer her testimony in favor of her son. The doors of the Hôtel were still open, and she was hesitating whether, with her difficulty in moving, she had best attempt the stairs, when she was startled by piercing shrieks from above. When she reached the salon she beheld a man lying on the ground with his shirt stained with blood. It was Georges—her youngest born!

Nana repeated over and over again:

"He wanted to marry me: I said no; and he killed himself."

Without a sound Madame Hujon sank on her knees by the side of her boy. Yes, it was Georges!

One of her sons was dishonored; the other assassinated. She was not shocked nor surprised. Everything seemed to be crumbling to pieces about her. Her face was that of profound despair—rigid and solemn as Death. Kneeling on the carpet, seeing nothing, and knowing nothing of what went on about her, she, with her eyes fixed on her boy's face, and her hands pressed upon his heart, seemed to listen.

Nana, seeing her great dignity, and oppressed by the silence, babbled over and over again:

"He killed himself—I did not do it—you see I have just come in!"

Madame Hujon started. She had felt a faint flutter of the heart. Then she looked up, and meeting the eyes of her companion, looked around the room, and seemed to realize where she was. A light kindled in her hollow eyes, while Nana continued to protest her innocence over the body that lay between them.

"I swear to you, Madame, that if his brother would come, he would understand."

"His brother has taken that which was not his own: he is in prison," said the mother, coldly.

Nana gasped. But what if the brother had been stealing? Was the whole family quite mad? She did not speak again, but sat looking on while Madame Hujon gave her orders to the servants, who had at last appeared. The old lady insisted that Georges, unconscious as he was, should be carried down to her carriage. She was determined at all costs to remove him from this house. Nana, with a dull, stupefied gaze, watched these men as they bore the boy away. The mother followed, her strength nearly gone, catching at the furniture as she passed to steady herself. Upon the staircase she could no longer restrain her sobs. She turned and said aloud to Nana:

"Ah! You have worked us infinite woe—infinite woe!"

This was all. Nana was still sitting with her hat on her head, just as she had come in. She had not even taken off her gloves.

The Hôtel was painfully silent as the carriage drove away; but she still sat where Madame Hujon had left her—every idea seemed to have deserted her. A half hour elapsed, and Comte Muffat coming in, found her in the same position. She relieved herself then with a torrent of words. She told him all that had happened, dwelling pertinaciously on every detail, and taking up the scissors, still stained with blood, she imitated the boy's gesture with which he struck himself. She eagerly defended herself.

"Now, was it my fault, dear? If you were Justice itself, would you condemn me? I did not tell Philippe to steal

money any more than I bade this boy kill himself! I think I am really most unfortunate. People come here and do all sorts of horrid things—give me no end of trouble—and treat me as if I were an adventuress!"

And she began to weep. Her nerves were shaken, and she was really in sorrow.

"You look displeased, too," she sobbed. "Ask Zoé all about it. Zoé, tell the Comte—"

The femme de chambre was on the floor with a basin of water and towels, and was rubbing the carpet with the hope of removing the stains of blood, while they were yet fresh.

"Oh, Monsieur!" she exclaimed. "Madame is unhappy enough already!"

Muffat was chilled to the heart by this tragedy, and by the thought of that weeping mother. He knew her great heart, and he saw her alone in her black raiment at Fondettes. But Nana's despair was momentarily increasing.

"He was so dear—so tender and so loving," she sobbed; "and you know—yes, I must say, even if it vexes you—that I loved the boy very much; and, after all, what does it matter to you? You have had your way, and he is no longer here to vex you."

Her tears choked her, and he did his best to console her. He told her she should have more courage; of course she was not to blame. She checked him, and bade him go and find out how Georges was.

"Hasten!" she said; "I shall be miserable until you come back."

He took his hat and departed. He returned in less than an hour, and found Nana leaning anxiously from a window: he called out from the sidewalk, that the boy was not dead, and that there was some chance of his life. Upon that she burst forth into wild singing and dancing; life was once more delightful in her eyes. Zoé, in the meantime, was not pleased with the result of her scrubbing. She looked at the spot, walked around it several times and said, over and over again:

"You know, Madame, that it is not out?"

And in fact the red stain was very apparent on the white

ground of the carpet. It was like a bar of blood across the door.

"Nonsense!" answered Nana, gayly; "the feet will soon wear it away."

After the next day, Comte Muffat, as well as herself, had forgotten the adventure. When he left her to make inquiries in regard to Georges, he had sworn, as he entered the fiacre, never again to step his foot in Nana's hôtel Heaven had sent him this warning, and he regarded the misfortunes of the Hujon brothers as especial lessons to himself; but the sight of the pallid mother, and of her boy tossing with fever, had not given him strength enough to keep his oath, and after a few hours there was a sense of unavowed relief, in being rid of a rival whose youthful freshness had always exasperated him. He was entirely absorbed by this passion, which was one of those which come late in life to men who have had no youth. He loved Nana as a lover and as a father; he wanted her near him; he wanted to feel that she was exclusively his; he was anxious for her welfare—desirous of seeing her happy. He had a vague vision of a Future wherein the world would have no part; of an affection and a redemption; of pardon received—both kneeling before God the Father. Each day Religion became more dear to him; he was more faithful in all his observances; went constantly to confession and to the Holy Communion; and struggled more than ever with remorse.

With great naïveté he offered to heaven, as an expiatory, the abominable agony he endured at Nana's hands. This agony increased, for he became daily more conscious of the change in himself; his honor, his delicacy, his sense of right and wrong, were all at the mercy of a *fille*. The perpetual infidelities of this woman tore his very heart-strings; he could not become accustomed to them, nor to the fact that she could not understand these feelings, and called them all ridiculous caprices. He craved an eternal love: she had sworn this; but he knew she was false—false to the very core.

One morning when he had seen Foucarmont leave the Hôtel at an unusual hour, he made a scene. She became very angry—resenting his jealousy, which she declared

she was tired of. Before this, whenever he had discovered her infidelities, she had been submissive, coaxing, and full of promises; but now she was absolutely brutal.

"Foucarmont shall come here whenever he chooses, or I want him!" she cried. "What have you to say about it, my little Muff?"

This was the first time she had thrown this epithet in his face; he was fairly stunned by the frankness of her avowal. She walked up to him and looked him full in the face.

"I have had enough of this," she said, coldly. "If you are not suited with me as I am, you can clear out. You shall not come here and find fault with me, and you may as well understand, first as last, that I intend to be free. Now what have you to say about it? Will you go or stay?"

She threw the door wide open; he did not go, and after this she had her own way. For a word—for the merest nothing—she told him he had better leave her; she had but to whistle, and plenty of men would come to her, every one of them far more desirable than he. His head drooped under this flood of insolent words. He waited until she was in a gentler mood—until she needed money—and became again caressing. A few hours of tenderness compensated him for a week of torture. His reconciliation with his wife made his home more intolerable than ever. The Countess, deserted by Fauchéry, who was again under the empire of Rose, had other friends now, and was restless and uneasy, pervading the whole hôtel with the excitement of her life. Estelle, since her marriage, rarely saw her father. This insignificant girl had developed into a woman of iron will, before whom Daguenet trembled. He went to mass with her, and was especially indignant with his father-in-law, who was ruining them all for a *fille*. Monsieur Vénot was all tenderness for the Count, and bided his time, saying that Heaven was watching over them all. He had fallen into a habit of going to Nana's hôtel, and from thence to that of the Countess; his crafty smile was always to be seen at one house or the other. And Muffat, miserable at home,—a prey to shame and to ennui,—preferred to spend

his time in the Avenue de Villiers, although insulted there and utterly cast down.

Very soon there was but one question between Nana and the Count, and that was money. One day, after promising her ten thousand francs, he ventured to appear at the appointed hour with empty hands. The day before she had been very loving, but such a shocking lack of probity was not to be overlooked. A man should always keep his promises! She was white with rage.

"You haven't the money? Then, my little Muff, you can go back to where you come from. Who ever heard of such impudence—to come in here with nothing in your pocket! No, no—no money, no anything! Do you understand?"

He attempted an explanation. He should have the money in a day or two. But she interrupted him violently.

"And what is to become of me in the meantime? My furniture will be seized, and I shall be put in prison for debt. Just look at yourself in that mirror. Do you think that I love you for your beauty? No, indeed! with a face like yours, a woman should be well paid for tolerating you near her! If you do not bring me the ten thousand francs this very night, you shall never again kiss the end of my little finger. I will send you skipping, and your wife may have you all to herself!"

That evening he brought the money, and Nana gave him her hand. As he pressed a long kiss upon it, he was rewarded for a day of humiliation.

Nana was intensely irritated by his constant presence, and she implored Monsieur Vénot to take her little Muff back to his Countess. What did their reconciliation amount to? It had done her no good whatever, and she wished she had never interfered. There were days when, in her anger, she said that she would treat him in such a way that never again would he come near her; but, she added roughly, she believed that if she were to slap his face he would say "thank you," and remain! There was a constant repetition of these scenes, all beginning or ending in a demand for money. She showed the most odious avidity, and gave him no peace. Her cruelty was repelling.

She told him his money was his only attraction; and that she loved another man with all her heart and soul, and that it was the greatest shame in the world that she had anything to do with an idiot like himself. They did not want him any longer at Court, and were often talking of requesting him to send in his resignation. The Empress had said: "Really he is too disgusting," and Nana rang the changes on this phrase:

"Yes; as the Empress says, you are too disgusting."

In this way she wound up all their disputes. She, however, had succeeded in gaining the most entire liberty Every day she drove in the Bois, and met all her acquaintances. The greatest curiosity was felt in regard to her. Titled women pointed her out; wealthy bourgeoises copied her hats, and her landau often stopped a long line of equipages—equipages that contained financiers who controlled all Europe, ministers whose nervous fingers clutched France by the throat. In this world she held a position of considerable importance; she was known in all the great capitals, and sought after by all distinguished strangers. She, with Lucy Stewart, Caroline Héquet and Maria Blond dined in the society of these foreigners, who gladly paid to be amused.

Count Muffat feigned ignorance of all this, whenever, at least, she did not fling the facts in his face. He suffered many other small mortifications. The Hôtel in the Avenue de Villiers became a torment; he never knew to what odious scene he was to be treated when he entered the doors. Nana quarrelled with her servants. At one time she had been too amiable to Charles the coachman, and was in the habit when she stopped at the restaurant of sending him out drinks by the garçon. She also talked to him from her landau. Then all at once her manner changed, and she treated him with the greatest severity, insisting on an account of every sou expended for hay, straw, or oats, for, in spite of her love of animals, she thought her horses eat far too much. One day, when she accused him, in so many words, of being a thief, Charles became very violent. He told her her horses were far better than she was, etc. She answered in much the same tone, and the Count was obliged to interfere and to

dismiss the man. This, however, completed the demoralization of the rest of the servants. Victorine and François departed, just after the loss of some diamonds had been discovered. Julien himself vanished, and it was whispered that the Count had paid him to go, because he had discovered that he was Madame's friend. Every week new faces came and went. Zoé alone lingered, persistently carrying out her own plans with her little business-like air—plans which she had been maturing for some time.

Then there were other trials still. The Count was called on to play cards with Madame Maloir, and to listen to Madame Lerat; to sympathize with little Louis, whose ailments were many—the inheritance from some unknown source. One evening, behind a door, he had heard Nana telling Zoé how she had been cheated by an American, who pretended to be rolling in money, and had gone off like a wretched scamp without leaving a sou behind him, not even a package of cigarette papers; and the Count crept softly down the stairs, lest he should be compelled to hear more if she knew him to be there. He was pale and sick, and staggered as he took his hat to go into the fresh air.

Another time there was no escape for him. Nana had a caprice for a baritone in a café concert, and when he left her she talked of suicide in a spasm of sentimentality; she swallowed a glass of water in which she had soaked a bundle of matches, which made her horribly sick, but did not kill her. The Count was obliged to take care of her, and to listen to the tale of her unhappy state, to witness her tears and hear her swear that never, no, never, would she believe a word that any man should ever again say to her. In spite of her contempt for the cheats, as she called men, she was never without one at her side. Muffat never dared to open a closet-door, move a curtain or touch a wardrobe, for strange faces and forms appeared. He coughed before he entered a room, ever since he had found Nana flirting with Francis one evening when he left the dressing-room for a minute to order the horses round, while the hairdresser was putting the last finishing touches to Madame's head.

The unhappy man was only at ease when he left Nana

and Satin together. He had, in fact, formed an alliance with Satin; twice she forced Nana to take him back. But an alliance with Satin was not an altogether easy thing, for she was at times perfectly unmanageable. Some days she broke everything in the Hôtel in her fits of rage. Zoé took her aside at such times, did her best to soothe her, and seemed to be confiding something of importance to her.

Thus did the Count gradually drink the dregs of his degrading position. Occasionally he had sudden and unexpected revolts. He had tolerated Satin for months, submitted to the presence of this crowd of men, strangers, whose very names he knew not, and yet fell into a rage at the idea of being deceived by any one of his acquaintances. When she admitted her relations with Foucarmont, he suffered intensely, and swore he would call the fellow out. He went to Labordette and poured out the story of his wrongs.

Labordette, at first stupefied, ended by laughing in his face:

"A duel on account of Nana? My dear fellow, all Paris would laugh at you. A man can't fight for Nana, it would be ridiculous!"

The Count became very pale. He clenched his hands.

"Then I will horsewhip him in the street."

Labordette reasoned with him for an hour. Such a thing would be preposterous; the town would ring with it; the newspapers would be filled; and Labordette ended with the same words: "It would be ridiculous!"

Each time this phrase fell with a dead weight on Muffat's heart. He could not even fight for the woman he loved, people would laugh. Never had he felt so keenly the misery of this affair. It was his last revolt. He, after this, allowed himself to float with the tide, and made no attempt to stem the torrent of men who came intimately to the Hôtel.

Nana devoured them one and all. Her ever increasing extravagance was such that she wasted vast sums in an evening. Foucarmont was ruined in less than a fortnight. He had been indulging in the hope of leaving the Navy; he had gradually saved, in thirty years of service,

some thirty thousand francs, which he intended to invest in the United States. All this he lavished upon her, and was utterly ruined. When Nana dismissed him he had not a sou. She took the life-blood of her friends and then tossed them aside, not so much because she was heartless as because they wearied her. She was very kind in her advice to Foucarmont. She told him he ought to return to his ship. He had nothing, and of course must begin all over again; he ought to see this and be sensible about it. A ruined man fell from her hands like overripe fruit, and was left to decay upon the ground.

Then Nana went back to Steiner, without, however, any pretence of affection. She thought him a "wretched little Jew." He was dull, and she made quick work of this Prussian, who had dropped Simonne. His Bosphorus matter—that famous tunnel, which was to open a new channel for the commerce of the world, began to totter, as did most of his enterprises, sooner or later. Nana precipitated this downfall by her mad demands. He struggled on for another month and performed miracles. He filled Europe with colossal hand-bills, announcements and prospectuses, which drew money from the most humble purses. All the funds he could get together, the louis of the speculators, the sous of the poor people, were engulfed in the Avenue de Villiers.

He was concerned in a great forge in Alsace. And down there, in a corner of that province were a crowd of workmen black with coal and bathed in sweat, who toiled night and day, that Nana's caprices might all be gratified. She devoured everything with the voracity of a great fire, leaving behind her all the desolation that marks the track of that devouring element. This time she finished Steiner, and sent him away so utterly used up, that he had not spirit enough to invent another new speculation. He trembled at the thought of the police; the mere word money threw into a fever of embarrassment this man who had handled millions. One evening he began to weep, and said he had not a hundred francs in the world—would not Nana lend him enough to pay his servant? And Nana, excited and interested by this end of the man

who had occupied so large a place in Paris for twenty years, gave him the money, saying:

"I give it to you, you understand, because it is such a funny thing to do. But you understand, of course, my friend, that I do not propose to support you. You are hardly of the age I should select. You must try and find something to do."

Then Nana took up La Faloise. He had been desirous of the honor of being ruined by her, feeling that only after that, could he be regarded as absolutely *chic*. In two months, he said, all Paris would know him. Six weeks sufficed. His property was in real estate, meadows, woods, and farms. He sold them one by one. At each mouthful Nana devoured a league or two. The leaves rustled in the breeze; the wheat ripened; the vines yellowed in the September sun; and the tall, rich grass through which the cattle waded, all passed out of his possession. Even a water-course and a stone quarry, as well as three mills, disappeared. Nana passed over them like one of those swarms of grasshoppers of which we read. She burned the earth on which she set her little foot. Farm after farm, meadow after meadow, she crunched down, unconsciously; just as she crunched a bag of pralines laid on her lap after dinner. They did not count; they were only bonbons. One fine evening one little wood was left, which she swallowed with an air of disdain; for it was not worth the trouble of opening her mouth. La Faloise sat sucking the end of his cane with an idiotic smile. He had not a hundred francs per annum left in the world. He saw himself forced to return to the country, and there live with a crazy uncle; but this did not matter. The *Figaro* had twice alluded to him in speaking of Nana, and was *chic* to a degree. His thin neck was exhibited by the turned-away points of his false collar; his vest was very short; he uttered little exclamations like a parrot; and was so deadly affected that Nana picked a quarrel with him, and dismissed him.

In the meantime Fauchéry had come back. This unfortunate Fauchéry was now in a very bad way. After breaking with the Countess, he was as a reed in the hands of Rose, who regarded him as her husband, and Mignon

himself as her major-domo. Mignon watched with jealous care over his fortune, well invested for the benefit of his sons. He had bowed before the passionate, wilful affection of his wife for Fauchéry; but he made the most of the position. Fauchéry installed as master, lied to Rose, and took all sorts of precautions whenever he deceived her, like a good husband who intends to settle down some day. Nana's great triumph was to have him manage a journal, the fruits of which she devoured, although Fauchéry had started and carried it on with a friend's money. The paper kept Nana in flowers for a couple of months. Then she had a new caprice—a winter garden in the corner of her Hôtel—and this swallowed up the printing press. When Mignon, delighted at the affair, went to see her, and asked if they could not together patch up the difficulty, she asked him what on earth he meant. Why should she help any one who had shown so little ability to help himself? He had no money, and lived in a hand-to-mouth sort of way. And she dismissed Fauchéry, who gave her nothing but publicity. But she always held him in kindly remembrance, for they had often laughed together at that idiot, La Faloise. They had sent him sometimes from one end of Paris to the other, in order that they might be alone, and when he returned he was received with so many jests and allusions which he could not comprehend, that he was perfectly miserable.

One day, encouraged by the Journalist, she vowed she would box the ear of La Faloise; and that very evening she did as she said she would do. She had bidden La Faloise to approach and receive his cuff, which was administered with such strength that her white hand was reddened. La Faloise laughed, but tears stood in his eyes —this familiarity enchanted him.

"Do you know," he said, one night; "that I think you ought to marry me—we should both be so comfortable."

These words were not as careless as they seemed. He had for some time been seriously contemplating this marriage, by which he hoped to astonish Paris. Nana's husband. What *chic* that would be! But Nana suppressed him at once.

"I marry you! Well! upon my word, if I had thought

of marrying, I could have found a husband long since; and a man, too, who was worth twenty times as much as yourself. You don't know, I suppose, that I have received any amount of propositions. Now—you count for me—Philippe, Foucarmont, Steiner—that makes four, doesn't it? And then there are several others whom you don't know. I can't be civil to a man that he does not sing that refrain: 'Won't you marry me? Won't you marry me?'"

She was becoming quite indignant, and finally burst out:

"No; I will not. Do I look as if I were made for the life of a married woman? Think of it. I should not be Nana any longer. I tell you it is disgusting!"

And she made a gesture of loathing.

One evening, La Faloise disappeared, and a week later, a report was in circulation that he was in the country, at his uncle's, who had a mania for botany. He pressed his flowers, and would probably marry a very ugly and very religious cousin. Nana was not much troubled at this intelligence. She said to the Count:

"My little Muff, you are in luck; for your rivals are steadily diminishing. He, too, wanted to marry me!"

He turned very pale, and she threw her arms around his neck; emphasizing each one of her cruel words with a kiss.

"Are you, too, troubled, my dear, that you can't marry Nana? When they are all bothering me with their silly talk about marriage, you rage in a corner. But, you see, you must wait until your wife drops off. How quickly you would come if she should happen to die! You would throw yourself on the ground at my feet and pour out oaths, tears, and entreaties, all at the same moment. That would not be so bad after all, would it?"

She had assumed the most coaxing tone. He listened, with his usually pale face deeply suffused. Suddenly, she exclaimed:

"Well! upon my word! I have hit it at last. He is really wishing for his wife to die! This is the crowning touch, and he is just as much of a fool as the others!"

Muffat's only consolation now was that he by the servants of the house was regarded as of more importance

than "the others"—as the man, who, paying the most, was the master of the establishment. He bought even her smiles however at a most extravagant rate, and had very little for his money. When he entered the rooms, his first act was to throw open the windows, to get rid of the smell of cigars smoked by "the others," who were, none of them, checked, as they crossed the threshold, by the stain of blood upon it. Zoé was quite nervous about this spot—nervous, however, simply on the ground of its lack of cleanliness. Her eyes continually turned toward it, and she never appeared in the presence of Madame without saying:

"It is very odd that it is still evident, for so many people are coming in all the time."

Nana, who had heard the best account of Georges, then in a state of convalescence at Fondettes with his mother, made the same reply each time:

"But it takes time. The feet are wearing it away—I can see the difference!"

These gentlemen—Foucarmont, Steiner, La Faloise, and Fauchéry—had carried away a portion of this stain on the soles of their boots. And Muffat, who watched the spot as closely as did Zoé, fancied he could tell the number of men who had passed over it in its gradual change. He felt a dull, nervous fear each time he stepped upon it, as if he ran the risk of crushing some living thing lying on the ground.

Once within the room his brain was dizzy; he forgot everything—the men who preceded him, the tragedy at the door. Sometimes in the streets he wept with shame, and swore that never again would he expose himself to such degradation; but when the portière fell he was wrapped in delicious languor. He, a *dévot*, experienced much the same sensations here, as in the superb chapels when, kneeling inside the stained glass windows, he succumbed to the intoxication of the swelling organs and the misty incense. This woman possessed him with the jealous despotism of a God of Wrath, terrifying him with seconds of joy which were like spasms in their vehemence—with visions of hell and eternal damnation. His spiritual necessities and physical wants were mingled together in the

depths of his nature, and he invariably left Nana's room shivering at the magnitude of her feminine power, in the same way that he shivered before the vast Unknown.

Nana, instead of being touched by his humility, now became insupportably tyrannical. She had by instinct a passion for soiling things as well as destroying them; her slender hands left their traces on all they touched. When she was alone with him, she talked to him as if he were a child, and compelled him to do all sorts of foolish things. She made him repeat phrases after her, or she insisted on his playing bear with her, and laughed as he went around the room on his hands and knees. She was a bear also, sometimes, and then she would say:

"What would they think of you at the Tuileries, my dear? If you could only see yourself! You can't imagine how ugly you are! But don't we make two nice bears?"

The former terrors of her sleepless nights had passed away, and her greatest and most congenial amusement was in the game that we have described—when they growled and snapped like wild beasts. One day he slipped and fell against a piece of furniture; she burst out into a loud laugh, when she saw a lump on his forehead.

Sometimes he was a dog. She threw her perfumed handkerchief to the other end of the room, and he picked it up with his teeth.

"Bring it, Cæsar! Good dog! good dog!"

She had a new caprice one fine day, and bade him come that evening in his grand costume as Chamberlain. She greeted him with a mocking shout, when he appeared in his gold and red coat, with the symbolic key hanging on his left hip. This key, for some reason, was excessively entertaining in her eyes. Overcome with laughter,—carried away by the disrespect she felt for all grandeur, and by the joy of being able to exercise her power over him even when he wore his official costume,—she shook him, pinched him, and asked over and over again:

"How are you, Chamberlain?"

She bade him throw his coat upon the ground, and

trample on the gold and on the eagles, and he obeyed her. After all, what was a Chamberlain to her? she crushed one as readily as she would have broken a sugar plum or a bottle.

Meanwhile the goldsmiths had kept their word, and the bed was sent to her toward the middle of January. Muffat at this time was in Normandy, where he went to try and sell some land, for Nana demanded four thousand francs at once. He was not to return for two days; but completing his business unexpectedly, he hurried back, and, without going first to La Rue de Merosmesnil, he went at once to the Avenue de Villiers. It was not yet noon. As he had a key of the small door opening on La Rue Cardenot, he went in that way. When Zoé, who was dusting the bronzes in the salon, saw him, she was dumbfounded. Recovering herself, she did her best to detain him by telling him a long story of how Monsieur Vénot had come the previous evening to find him; how that gentleman was in the greatest agitation, and after going away, had returned to say that the Count was to come to him immediately on his arrival, without the delay of a moment.

Muffat listened, not understanding the tale; but noticing a certain confusion in this woman's manner, he fell into a blind fury of jealous rage, of which he had not believed himself capable. He threw himself against the door of Nana's room; the door yielded, and Zoé withdrew, with a shrug of the shoulders. Really, if Madame was so silly, she must look out for herself; and Muffat, standing on the threshold, uttered a cry of agony at what he saw.

The room glowed with all its royal magnificence. Silver ornaments held down the tea-rose-colored velvet, that soft color of the sky in a summer's twilight, when Venus is just rising above the horizon; golden ropes and tassels hung from the corners, and all the panels were framed in gold. In the centre was the bed, of chiselled gold and silver, a throne large enough for the most powerful of her sex, and beside it she was standing with the calmness of an idol. In the room was the Marquis de Chouard, decrepit, old and shameless.

The Count shuddered from head to foot.

It was for the Marquis de Chouard then, that these

golden roses bloomed! It was for him that these Cupids gambolled; and it was for him that the faun guarded the beautiful slumbering figure of Nana!

Nana leaped quickly to close the door. What vile luck she did have, to be sure, with her little Muff, he was always coming in at the wrong moment! Besides, why did he go off to Normandy after money? His father-in-law had brought her the four thousand francs she needed, and, of course, after that, she permitted him to stay.

"It is all your fault!" she cried, as she shut the door with a bang. "What business have you to come in that way? Good riddance to you!"

Muffat stood before the closed door, annihilated by what he had seen. He continued to shake and shiver; this tremulous motion extended from his lower limbs to his shoulders and head. He was like a great tree shaken by the wind. He tottered, swayed to and fro for a moment, and then sank upon his knees; with uplifted arms he cried:

"It is too much; oh! my God, it is too much!"

He had accepted everything, but now his strength was gone, and he was no longer capable of struggling in this black darkness which compassed him round about. He called on God for assistance with extraordinary vehemence.

"Succor me! oh, Lord my God!" he prayed. "Send me Death, take me away, that I may neither feel, hear, nor see again! To Thee I wish to belong—to Thee, oh, God! Our Father who art in Heaven—"

And he continued, burning with Faith and Religious ardor—passionate words poured from his lips. But some one touched him on the shoulder. It was Monsieur Vénot, who was startled at seeing him praying before this closed door. Then, as if God Himself had answered his prayer, the Count threw himself into the arms of the little old man. Tears at last came to his relief, and he sobbed over and over again:

"My brother! oh! my brother!"

All his crushed and suffering humanity burst forth in this cry:

"You alone are left to me; do with me what you will. Pity me and take me away."

Monsieur Vénot pressed him to his breast and called him brother. But he came as bearer of a new misfortune. He had been in search of him, since the previous evening, in order to tell him that the Countess Sabine had fled with a man who kept a large Magasin de Nouveautés, a frightful scandal, with which all Paris was ringing. Seeing him in this state of religious exaltation, he felt the moment to be most favorable to his own plans, and informed the Count of this tragedy under his roof. But Muffat was unmoved; his wife was gone, what did it matter? Looking around at the doors and the walls with terror, he repeated his supplication:

"Take me away! Take me away!. I can bear no more!"

And Monsieur Vénot led him away like a child, and from that moment ruled him entirely. Muffat returned to the strictest observances of his religion. His life was shattered. He sent in his resignation as Chamberlain, in consequence of the opinion expressed by the Empress. Estelle, his daughter, brought a suit against him for sixty thousand francs, an inheritance from her aunt which she was to have received at her marriage. Utterly ruined, living on what remained to him of his once enormous fortune, he allowed the Countess to absorb those crumbs disdained by Nana.

Sabine, contaminated by the vicinity of this *fille*, stopped at nothing; after further adventures, equally discreditable, she had returned to her home, and her husband received her with the resignation of Christian forgiveness. She sat at his fireside, the incarnation of his shame. But by degrees he ceased to suffer from these things. Heaven had taken him from the grasp of a woman, to lay him at the feet of God. It was a repetition of prayers, entreaties, and despair addressed to God instead of to a human being. Kneeling on the cold stones in the churches, he found once more the joys of old.

The evening after Muffat's departure from Nana's house Mignon presented himself there. He was beginning to feel that Fauchéry's constant presence was not so bad a thing after all—when the journalist was with his wife he himself was free. His course was now marked out; he left to Fauchéry all the *petits soins* of the house, and

allowed him to supply the daily expenses of the establishment, from the money he made, by the success of his dramatic efforts. Fauchéry, on his side, was equally amiable; so that, by degrees the two men lived together in the most harmonious manner, and both toiled for the common good. Acting on Fauchéry's advice, Mignon had now come to see if he could not rob Nana of her femme de chambre, whose intelligence the Journalist estimated very highly. Rose was in despair. For a month she had been at the mercy of inexperienced servants who had given her an infinite degree of trouble and annoyance.

It so happened that Zoé opened the door. Mignon led the way into the dining-room. At his first words she smiled. Impossible! she was about to leave Madame, and intended to establish herself on her own account; and she added with an air of discreet vanity that she was each day receiving new propositions, and the ladies were all disputing for her. Madame Blanche had offered her any sum if she would go to her. But Zoé was about to take the establishment of La Tricon. She had long had the idea in her head; she was full of liberal plans, and intended to greatly enlarge the business and to take another hôtel, and had hoped to take Satin with her. Mignon pointed out to her the risk she would incur, but Zoé smiled in a lofty way, and then said, with as much ease as if she were about buying out a confectioner's establishment:

"Luxuries always command their price! I have been a slave to other people long enough. Now people may be slaves to me!"

And she added that she would be Madame, and would manage all these women, for whom for the last fifteen years she had performed so many menial offices.

Mignon wished to know if Nana would receive him, and Zoé left him a moment alone while she went to ascertain, saying that Madame had had a very bad day of it. Mignon had never been in the house but once, and of course was unfamiliar with it. The dining-room, with its Gobelin tapestry, its china and silver, astonished him. He opened all the doors and examined the salon and the winter garden. All this luxury [illegible] crushed him.

the silk and the velvet, the satin and the gold, filled him with wonder and approval. When Zoé came back she offered to show him the other apartments—the dressing-room and the bed-room. In this latter place the enthusiasm of Mignon became boundless. This Nana absolutely stupefied him—him, who had known her so long. Amid all the evidences of the ruin hanging over this house, in spite of all the carelessness and recklessness of the servants, there was such an enormous amount of riches piled up under that roof that they served to conceal the cracks and crevices; and Mignon thought involuntarily of an aqueduct at Marseilles, where the stone arches of a bridge spanned an abyss—a Cyclopean work which had cost many millions, and ten years' labor. At Cherbourg he had seen the Jetty and an immense timber yard, where hundreds of men sweated in the hot sun, but these sank into insignificance. Nana was greater than them all; and he experienced, in the presence of the results of her labor, the same sensation of respect which he had felt when he gazed on a superb château built by a refiner: sugar alone had paid for its royal splendor. This Nana, with that wonderful lever by which the whole world is moved, had shaken Paris to its foundation, and built up a fortune.

"Is it not marvellous?" murmured Mignon.

CHAPTER XXII.

DEAD! DEAD! DEAD!

NANA, by degrees, had fallen into a state of great ennui. The meeting of the Count and the Marquis had amused her intensely for a few hours; but, after that, the thought of the old man going off in a fiacre alone, and half dead, and of her poor Muff, whom she should never see again, gave her a faint pang of regret, and she began to be quite melancholy. She was disturbed by hearing that Satin was ill at Lariboisière. She had just ordered her carriage to go and see that little scape-grace when Zoé came in to give her her week's notice. All at once, on hearing this, Nana became quite despairing. It seemed to her that she was losing one of her own family. How should she live without her? And she implored Zoé to remain. The woman, quite flattered by Madame's despair, embraced her, to signify that she bore her no malice, but persisted in her intention. This day was full of unpleasant surprises. Nana was sitting drearily in her salon, for she had given up all idea of going out, when Labordette coming in great haste to tell her of some magnificent laces to be sold at a bargain, happened to drop the information between two phrases that Georges was dead. She was chilled with horror.

"Dead!" she cried.

Involuntarily she turned to find the stain on the carpet, but it was gone; it was worn away at last. Meanwhile, Labordette proceeded to give her all the information that he himself had received. There was some talk of a wound re-opening; others said it was a suicide—that the boy had drowned himself. Nana said in a low voice over and over again:

"Dead! Dead! Dead!"

Then she burst into that wild spasm of tears and sobs with which she had been struggling all that day. These tears finally relieved her, and left her gently sad.

Labordette tried to console her, but she waved him away, saying: "I am miserable. Everybody will begin to talk once more, and will say I am a vile wretch. They will say I have ruined the poor man whom I heard praying outside my door, and all the others. I can hear them now—"

And she began to cry again, and threw herself on the sofa with her head buried among the cushions. The woe and the misery she dimly felt about her—the ruin she made—began to appeal to her, and her voice was that of a little girl.

"Oh! How ill I feel! I cannot bear it; it will kill me. It is so hard not to be understood—so hard to see people all against you, because they are the stronger! It is particularly hard when one has done no harm, and is conscious of having tried to do right."

Her grief was in danger of being forgotten in her growing anger. She started to her feet, dried her eyes, and spoke, with great agitation:

"They may say what they please; it is not my fault. Am I wicked or cruel in any way? I give away everything I have, and I would not kill a fly. It was they themselves who did it all. They were always hanging about my steps, and now they all turn upon me."

Stopping before Labordette, for she was walking up and down the room, she tapped him on the shoulder.

"Now tell me the truth—was it I who ruined these men? Did I draw them to me, or did they come of their own free will? They disgusted me, and that is the truth. Did you know that some of them wished to marry me? I might have been a Countess or a Baroness, twenty times had I so chosen. But I always refused, because I had common sense. They would have stolen—murdered father and mother—all for me! I had but one word to say, and I never said it. And this is my reward. Did not I marry Daguenet to a woman of noble family, with a fortune, too? And had not I supported him for weeks before that? Yesterday I met him in the street, and he actually turned away his head. Heavens and earth! Am I not as good as she?"

She began to pace the room again. And as she passed

a guéridon she brought her fist down upon it with immense violence.

"It is not just! I say it is not just! Society is badly constructed. Women are attacked and abused when it is really the men who are to blame. We are their slaves, and, generally speaking, deadly tired of them. But for them I should probably be in a convent to-day, and have spent my days praying to God, for I have always been more or less religious. It is all their fault, and I shall say so forever and ever."

Zoé showed Mignon into the room. Nana received him with a smile. She had had a good cry, and now it was all over. He complimented her on her beautiful home, for his enthusiasm had not yet cooled; but she displayed utter indifference to her Hôtel; she was thinking of other things, and of the days when she would abandon all this magnificence. He, to give some pretext for his visit, spoke of a benefit to be given to old Bosc, who had been struck down by paralysis, and she at once took two boxes, and spoke of Bosc with interest and compassion. Zoé now announcing to Madame that her carriage was waiting she called for her hat, and as she tied the strings she said:

"I am going to the hospital to see Satin. No one ever loved me as she has, and I want to tell her that I am sorry for her."

Labordette and Mignon exchanged a smile. She was no longer sad, she smiled as gayly as ever; these men could not understand her, and both admired her as she stood buttoning her gloves. She was alone amid the piled-up wealth of her Hôtel. Like those fabled monsters whose domains were white with bones, wherever she put down her foot, it was on a human skull. Catastrophes surrounded and followed her. The frightful death of Vandeuvres in the flames; Foucarmont lost in the China seas; Steiner's disasters, which compelled him to live like an honest man; the imbecile bankruptcy of La Faloise—the tragic fate of the Muffats; and the pale corpse of Georges Hujon, watched over by Philippe, who had just emerged from prison—were all her work. She had fulfilled her mission. The fly born and bred in the Faubourgs, and laden with wretchedness, had destroyed these men merely by her

touch. It was well, it was just; she had avenged her *monde*, avenged the wrongs of many broken-hearted and deserted women. And while her sex shone upon all her victims, outstretched before her, as the rising sun shines on a field of carnage, she preserved all her ignorant indifference—the indifference of self-satisfaction. She was plump and fair, smooth-skinned and careless. She was weary of her Hôtel, weary of the furniture with which it was crowded. She began to think of something more amusing, and she started off *en grande toilette* to embrace Satin for the last time, in the best of spirits.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NANA'S FLIGHT.

NANA suddenly disappeared from the eyes of every one. Before her departure she gave herself the new sensation of an auction. She parted with everything, her Hôtel and furniture, her jewels and laces, her robes and linen. She herself called it her sale after her death. From it she realized some five hundred thousand francs. Paris saw her, for the first time, in a fairy spectacle—Mélusine at the Gaîté—which Bordenave, literally without a sou, had had the audacity to take. There she found Prullière and Fontan. Her rôle was nothing, it consisted simply of three poses—a powerful fairy, and a silent one, followed by another tableau, in which her beauty was fully displayed by electric light. Then, in the midst of the most absolute success, when Paris was covered with huge placards, it was discovered one fine morning that she departed the previous evening for Cairo, on account of some small difference with her Manager. She, as she said, was too rich a woman to allow any dictation; and besides she had for a long time been seriously contemplating a visit to the Turks.

Months passed away, and she was nearly forgotten. If, by chance, her name was mentioned among those persons whom she had known so well, the strangest stories were told, and each person exerted himself to recount the most incredible as well as the most contradictory. She had made the conquest of a Viceroy, she reigned in a palace over a retinue of two hundred slaves, whose heads she cut off when she wanted a little excitement. Not at all; she had ruined herself for a negro, and was literally without a sou in the world, begging in the streets of Cairo.

One day there was a thrill of astonishment—she had been seen in Russia, whereupon a new legend was put in circulation. She was the adored one of a Prince, and her diamonds were a wonder. Soon the women all knew them

by heart, their weight and their settings. No one was able to say where the information came from—rings, earrings, bracelets, a rivière as wide as two fingers; a diadem, which might be worn by a queen, with a jewel in the centre as large as one's thumb. In the halo and mystery lent by these distant lands, she assumed the proportions of some idol covered with precious stones. She was now spoken of with the great respect due to this fortune, made among the barbarians.

One evening in June, about half-past seven, Lucy, who was descending from her carriage in La Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, saw Caroline coming out of a shop in that vicinity. She called her.

"Have you dined? Have you an engagement?" said Lucy, breathlessly. "Oh! my dear, come with me. Nana has returned!"

Caroline entered the carriage without one word.

"And do you know," continued Lucy; "she is, perhaps, dying while we are chattering!"

"Dying!" exclaimed Caroline. "What on earth do you mean? Where is she? And what is she dying of?"

"At the Grand Hôtel—of small-pox. Oh! it is such an awful thing!"

Lucy told her coachman to drive rapidly, and, as the horses flashed along La Rue Royale and the Boulevards, she told her story.

"Nana left Russia—I don't know why; a quarrel with her Prince, I believe. She left her luggage at the station and drove to her aunt's—you know the old thing! Well! she found out that her boy had the small-pox; the child died the next day, and she quarrelled with her aunt about the money she should have sent, and which she failed to do. It seems that the child died for the want of it; for the want of proper care and nourishment. Nana goes off to a Hôtel, and meets Mignon just as she is attending to her luggage. She feels ill, shivers, is faint and sick at her stomach. Mignon takes her back to her room and promises to see to her trunks himself. Now, was not that queer? But the queerest is still to come: Rose hears about Nana's illness and rushes off to take care of her. You remember how they hated each other; they

were always like two furies. Well, my dear, Rose insisted on Nana's leaving the wretched place she was in and going to the Grand Hôtel, that, if she should chance to die, it might be in a stylish place, and she has been there now three days and nights. It was Labordette who told me about it, and as of course I wanted to see her—"

"Yes, indeed," interrupted Caroline, in great excitement. "We will go."

They had arrived. The coachman had the greatest difficulty in drawing up to the sidewalk so great was the crowd of carriages. Pedestrians were hurrying past. The *Corps Legislatif* had voted for War that day, and the excitement was intense. The sun was setting on the side of La Madeleine—setting behind deep red clouds, which, reflected on the tall windows, looked as if there were a fire within. The twilight was growing deeper, and a certain melancholy hung over the streets, where, as yet, the gas was not lighted. The crowd, great as it was, was very quiet, and faces were pale with anxiety.

"There is Mignon," said Lucy. "He will bring us news!"

Mignon stood before the wide porch of the Grand Hôtel with a nervous, excited air, looking at the crowd. At Lucy's first question he answered, angrily:

"How do I know? For two days Rose has been up there, and I have not been able to get her away. The idea of her risking her complexion in this way! She would look nice, wouldn't she, with holes in her face?"

The idea that Rose might lose her beauty exasperated him. What did he care for Nana? And he openly swore at the silly ways of women, and at the devotion shown by Rose. Fauchéry now appeared, equally anxious and equally vexed with Rose.

"She is just the same," answered Mignon. "I wish you would go up and make Rose come away with you."

"You are very kind!" answered the Journalist. "Why don't you go yourself?"

Then, as Lucy spoke of going up with Caroline, they implored her to send Rose down. Lucy, however, was in no haste. She had just seen Fontan, with his hands in his pockets, making his way through the crowd. When he heard of Nana's illness he said, with a sentimental air:

"Ah, poor thing! I must shake hands with her. What is her illness?"

"Small-pox," answered Mignon, abruptly.

The actor had taken a step or two toward the stairs, but he turned back quickly, muttering, "The deuce she has!"

Now small-pox is no joke. Fontan had come very near having it when five years old. Mignon told the story of a niece who had died of it. As to Fauchéry, he showed three marks near his nose, and claimed to have had the disease. Mignon at once urged him to go up, because, as he said, people could not have small-pox twice. This theory Fauchéry at once combated violently. Lucy and Caroline stopped this discussion, to ask what was the meaning of the constantly increasing crowd.

It was now growing very dark; the gas-lights afar off were being slowly lighted. Every window was crowded with people; groups stood under the trees; the rush and crowd momentarily increased, while the carriages moved very slowly. Suddenly a great excitement flashed through the crowd; a body of men wearing white blouses and caps swept down the sidewalk. As they came they shouted, beating time as with hammers upon an anvil:

"On to Berlin! On to Berlin! On to Berlin!"

The crowd watched these men with sad distrust, thrilled though they were, as by martial music.

"Yes! Go and break your necks!" muttered Mignon.

But Fontan thought this very fine; he spoke of himself volunteering. When the enemy were on the frontiers every good citizen should defend his country, he said, and he assumed the attitude of Bonaparte at Austerlitz.

"Come! will you go up and see her with us?" asked Lucy.

"For what? to fall sick and die myself?" was his question in return.

Before the Grand Hôtel, on a bench, sat a man whose face was half hidden in his handkerchief. Fauchéry saw him at once, and pointed him out cautiously to Mignon.

"Was he always there?" he asked.

"Yes, always," answered the Journalist.

The stranger looked up at one of the upper windows, and the two men uttered an exclamation. It was the Comte Muffat!

"He has been there all day long; I saw him at six o'clock," said Mignon. "When Labordette told him that Nana was dying, he came there, and has never moved since, except to go every half-hour and ask if the person in the room, the number of which he gives, is any better, and then he comes back to the same place. That room is not healthy, and no matter how much one has loved people, it is not worth while to die with them."

The Count, with eyes uplifted, seemed to realize nothing that was going on about him. He probably had not heard of the declaration of war, and did not notice the crowd.

"Look!" said Fauchéry. "You will see now what he has done all day."

In fact, the Count now left the bench and entered the large door; but the concierge, who knew him, did not wait for the question, but said, abruptly:

"She is dead, sir; she died just this very moment."

Dead! Nana dead? This was a shock to every one. Muffat's limbs bent under him, and sinking on the bench he turned his face away. The others uttered an exclamation, but their words were cut short by a new body of men hurrying by and shouting:

"On to Berlin! On to Berlin! On to Berlin!"

Nana dead, and such a beautiful creature! Mignon sighed with an air of relief. Now, perhaps, Rose would come down; he was chilly. Fontan, who thought it best to try a tragic rôle, drew down the corners of his mouth and rolled up his eyes; while Fauchéry, really touched, gnawed the end of his cigar. Meanwhile the two men continued to exclaim:

"The last time Lucy saw her, it was at the Gaîté." "Blanche was in the same play." "Oh, my dear, it was entrancing when she appeared in the crystal grotto!" —the gentlemen remembered the occasion—"Fontan had played the part of Prince Cocorico," and they all went off into interminable details. No; Nana had not said one syllable throughout the whole part; she had refused to learn one single phrase. She said it was enough that the public should use their eyes. And was there ever such perfection of form — such completeness of physical beauty? Was it not odd that she should be dead? That night she wore a golden belt and a fairy dress;

around her was the grotto and a running brook; while stalactites hung from the vaulted roof, and she, amid that cold, transparent atmosphere, was like the sun, with her glowing face and tawny hair!—Paris remembered her thus, and what a stupid thing it was to let her die in such a way! "She must be beautiful even in death, as she lies there," said some one.

Mignon groaned—he never liked to see anything wasted! He asked Lucy and Caroline if they still proposed to go up-stairs. Of course they did; their curiosity had increased rather than diminished. Just then Blanche arrived, all out of breath and indignant at the crowd that filled the sidewalk; and when she heard what had taken place, new exclamations were uttered, and the ladies rustled toward the staircase, Mignon following to say:

"Tell Rose I am waiting, and to come at once."

"It is a mooted question whether the contagion is to be feared at the beginning or the end of the disease," Fontan explained to Fauchéry. "One of my friends—an assistant at a hospital—told me that the hours immediately after death were the most dangerous—certain miasmas are generated. Ah! I regret this sudden finale. I should so like to have taken her by the hand once more."

"But why—where was the good?" asked the Journalist.

"Yes; where was the good?" repeated the two others.

A new tumult was in the crowd, which was becoming more and more dense, and the same overwhelming shout was heard.

"On to Berlin! On to Berlin! On to Berlin!"

On the fourth floor the rooms were let at twelve francs per day. Rose had taken one of these. She wanted comfortable quarters for Nana; but it is not necessary to have things very luxurious when one is suffering. Hangings of Louis XIII. cretonne—large flowers on a pale ground; mahogany furniture, and a red carpet covered with dark leaves made up the furniture. A heavy silence reigned, broken only by one long, quivering sigh, when, all at once, voices were heard in the corridor.

"I assure you that we are lost; the garçon said turn to the right, and I am sure I don't know where to go."

"Wait a moment; look at the numbers—401 is what we

want. Ah! yes, to be sure—405, 403. Here we are; this is 401. Hush! Hush!"

Another silence, a cough, and the door opened slowly. Lucy entered first, followed by Caroline and Blanche. But they stopped short; five women were already in the room. Gaga was lying back in the only arm-chair—a Voltaire covered with red velvet. In front of the chimney, Clarisse and Simonne were talking with Leá de Horn, who was sitting upon a low chair. Before the bed at the left of the door, leaning on a wooden chest, was Rose Mignon, gazing fixedly into the shadow of the curtains. All the other women had on their hats and gloves, as if paying a morning visit. Rose alone wore neither hat nor gloves, and was pale and haggard with watching for three successive nights—saddened and shocked by this sudden death. On the corner of the commode was a lamp, well shaded, but which threw its light full on Gaga.

"How melancholy! murmured Lucy, as she pressed Rose Mignon's hand. "We wished to say good-bye to her!"

And she turned her head to try and see; but the lamp was too far away, and she dared not touch it. On the bed, lay a dark mass, the light hair was barely distinguishable, and a pale spot which might be the face. Lucy added:

"And I have never seen her since that night at the Gaîté, when she appeared in that grotto scene."

Then Rose smiled faintly, and shaking off her stupor, said:

"Ah! she is changed, greatly changed!"

Then she relapsed into her contemplation, and said not one other word, and stood perfectly motionless. The women all drew closer together, near the chimney. Simonne and Clarisse spoke of the diamonds belonging to the deceased, in a low voice. After all were there really any diamonds? No one had ever seen them, and it might all be mere talk. But Leá de Horn affirmed that she knew some one who knew them, and said the stones were enormous! And this could not be all. She had brought from Russia many superb things—wonderful embroideries, and precious bric-à-brac, with a table service in gold. Yes, my dear, there were fifty-two huge boxes and trunks. There was furniture too; and all these things were still at the

station. How strange it was that she died before she could settle up her affairs! She must have left considerable property. Who would inherit it? As her parents were dead, it would be the aunt, of course—and a great stroke of luck it would be for the old lady. She knew nothing of it yet; for Nana had obstinately refused to send for her, as she felt none too kindly toward her by reason of the death of her boy.

They then discussed the boy, and said they had seen him at the races—a pale, sick-looking little fellow, like a little old man—a mite that had better never been born.

"He is happier under the sod," murmured Blanche.

"Pshaw! and so is she," added Caroline. "Life is not such a very agreeable thing for any of us, in my opinion."

Their thoughts in this chamber of Death were not enlivening. They were afraid, and it was foolish to stay any longer; but they could not make up their minds to depart. The room was very warm, and the glass shade over the lamp cast upon the ceiling a white circle like a moon. In a deep plate under the bed was a disinfectant that emitted a faint, sickening odor. Light breezes stirred the curtains of the windows open on the Boulevard, from which rose a low, dull murmur.

"Did she suffer much?" asked Lucy, as she mechanically gazed at the ornament on the clock—the three Graces, with their stereotyped smiles.

Gaga started, and answered:

"Yes. I was here when she died. She shivered from head to foot—"

But she could not continue. A long-continued shout arose:

"On to Berlin! On to Berlin! On to Berlin!"

And Lucy, who was stifling, threw open the window wide, and leaned out. How delicious the air was! A dewy freshness fell from the starry sky. Opposite, the windows were blazing with lights, and the gas showed all the golden letters on the signs. Below, both on the sidewalk and in the street there was a surging crowd; a body of men coming up the street carried torches. A red light came from La Madeleine, like the reflection from a fire.

Lucy called aloud to Blanche and Caroline, forgetting where she was.

"Come, quick! you can see splendidly from this window!"

They all three leaned out, deeply interested. They grumbled at the trees, for the foliage shut out the torches from time to time. They tried to see the gentlemen they had left down-stairs, but a balcony concealed the door; they could only find Comte Muffat sitting doubled up on the bench. A carriage stopped, and Lucy recognized Maria Blond, another person who wished to make inquiries. She was not alone; a large heavy man was with her.

"Steiner, if I live!" cried Caroline. "How is it that he has not been sent back to Cologne? I should like to see him when he comes into this room."

They turned to watch the door. And at the end of some ten minutes, when Maria Blond appeared, indignant at having missed the right stairs, she was alone. When Lucy questioned her in some amazement—

"Heavens, my dear!" she answered, "did you imagine that he would have come as far even as the door? No, he is with the other men, a dozen of them, who are smoking their cigars."

This was the case. They glanced at the crowd, and they exclaimed at the death of this poor *fille*, and then they talked politics. Bordenave, Daguenet, Labordette, Prullière and several others had joined the group, and all were listening to Fontan, who explained his plan of a campaign which would deliver Berlin into their hands in five days.

In the meantime Maria Blond went toward the bed, and said just what each of the other women had said:

"Poor thing! The last time I saw her was at the Gaîté in the grotto."

"Ah! she is changed, greatly changed!" said Rose Mignon, with her faint, sad smile.

Two more women now came in, Tatan Néné and Louise Violaine; they, too, had been wandering around the Grand Hôtel for twenty minutes, they had gone up and down-stairs, encountering many persons who were hurrying to leave Paris, in their terror of a war, as well as of interior revolt and excitement. They, therefore, dropped on

chairs when they came in, too weary to think of the dead woman.

At that moment there was a great noise in the next room—a rolling of trunks and a moving of heavy furniture, and voices spoke in strange, guttural tones. It was a youthful Austrian ménage. Gaga told how, when Nana was dying, she had heard these people laughing, and that, as only a door divided these rooms, she had heard the young husband kiss his wife.

"We must go," said Clarisse; "we cannot bring her back to life. Come, Simonne."

They all turned once more toward the bed, but did not move to go. They shook out their skirts a little in preparation, however. Lucy was leaning from the window now all alone. She grew sadder and sadder, as if a profound melancholy arose from that noisy crowd. Torches, with blazing sparks streaming from them, were still carried quickly by, and afar off, the men were lost in the darkness huddled together like a flock of sheep led, in the night, to the Abattoir; and from these masses rose a confused terror—a foretaste of future massacres. New shouts arose:

"On to Berlin! On to Berlin! On to Berlin!"

Lucy turned, and still leaning against the window said, with a pale face and paler lips:

"My God! what will become of us?"

Her friends shook their heads, they were very anxious.

"As for myself," said Caroline Héquet, in her calm way, "I shall leave, the day after to-morrow, for London. My mother is already there, and I don't propose to remain here and be killed!"

Her mother, like a prudent woman, had invested all their means in a foreign land. One can never predict when a war will end. But Maria Blond was angry. She was a patriot, and talked of following the army.

"Yes, if I were needed, I would put on the dress of a man and fight these rascally Prussians."

Blanche de Sévry was exasperated.

"You need not speak ill of the Prussians. They are men like other men, only far better. Do you know that my little Prussian, a rich and amiable young fellow, incapable of doing any harm to any one, has been dismissed

from France. It was an insult, and it ruined me. I am not at all sure that I shall not go to Germany in pursuit of him!"

Then Gaga began to tell her woes; she murmured in the most disconsolate tone:

"It is finished, and I have no chance whatever. Not eight days ago I made my last payment for my little house at Juvisy. Lili helped me, or I should never have done it. And now War is declared. The Prussians will come and they will burn everything. What on earth am I to do at my age?"

"Pshaw!" said Clarisse; "you will get on!"

"Certainly," answered Simonne; "we shall all get on, and I think we may have a good time after all—"

And with a significant smile she completed her thought.

Tatan Néné and Louise Violaine entertained the same opinion. One said she adored soldiers. But, as these women raised their voices, Rose Mignon, still leaning on the chest near the bed, silenced them with a long "Hush!" They stood aghast, with an oblique glance toward the bed, as if this prayer for silence had come from within the curtains, and in the profound stillness that followed, they listened to the outcries of the crowd:

"On to Berlin! On to Berlin! On to Berlin!"

But presently they forgot all this again. Leá de Horn, who had kept a political salon where Louis Philippe's ministers had uttered delightful epigrams, murmured in a low voice:

"This war is a frightful blunder—a terrible mistake!"

Then, all at once, Lucy burst forth in defence of the Empire. She had had a long acquaintance with a Prince of the Imperial House, and therefore spoke with authority, and as one of the family.

"No, my dear, we cannot allow ourselves to be insulted. This War is the only honorable course for France. Oh! You know that I do not say this on account of the Prince! for he was obviously mean! When we played besique he always played for beans, because, one night, I had been foolish enough to snatch his gold. But that does not prevent me from being just. The Emperor was right!"

Leá nodded her head with a wise air, as if she were repeating the opinion of persons of weight and influence; then slowly added:

"It is the end of all things. They are mad at the Tuileries—all of them. Yesterday, you see, France ought—"

They all interrupted her violently. What had the Tuileries done to her that she was so bitter against them? Had not her matters gone well? Had Paris ever been gayer or more agreeable?

"It has all been a mistake—" began Clarisse.

Gaga now entered the fray.

"Hold your tongues! What you say is perfectly idiotic. I lived under Louis Philippe—and a dreary time it was too, my dear. Then came '48—a nice time that was—with their Republic! After February, I with difficulty kept body and soul together; I nearly died of hunger. If you had lived at that time you would now go down on your knees before our Emperor, for he has been our father—yes, our father!"

They tried to calm her, but she continued, with religious fervor:

"Father in Heaven grant Victory to the Emperor! Do Thou preserve to us the Empire!"

They all repeated this pious wish.

Blanche admitted that she had burned some candles for the Emperor, and the others burst out into furious words against the Republicans, and declared they ought to be exterminated on the frontier, so that Napoleon III., after beating the enemy, might reign quietly amid general joy and thanksgiving.

"And Bismarck—he—"

"And to think that I knew him," said Simonne, interrupting Maria Blond. "If I could have foreseen all this, I would certainly have put some drug into his glass."

But Blanche, not yet forgetting the expulsion of her Prussian, undertook to defend Bismarck.

"He was not so bad after all, perhaps!"

And she added:

"You know that he adores women?"

"What has that to do with us now?" said Clarisse. "We are not likely to meet him, I fancy."

The discussion continued. Bismarck was frightfully abused in their Bonapartist zeal, while Tatan Néné said, in a vexed tone:

"Bismarck! I have heard so much of him—and I never met this Bismarck,—but one can't know everybody."

"No matter," said Leá de Horn, abruptly, "this Bismarck, I fancy, will lead us a jolly dance—"

She could not continue, for all the women pounced upon her, and asked her what on earth she meant by such talk as that?

"Hush!" sighed Rose Mignon, distressed at all the noise.

Again the cold blast swept over them, and they relapsed into uncomfortable silence. Again they heard the cry:

"On to Berlin! On to Berlin! On to Berlin!"

Then as they decided to depart, a voice called from the corridor:

"Rose! Rose!"

Gaga opened the door and glided out. When she came back, she said:

"It was Fauchéry, my dear. He is at the end of the corridor, and will not come any further: he is almost crazy, because you will stay here near this body."

Mignon had succeeded in pushing on the Journalist. Lucy, looking from the window, perceived all the men on the sidewalk below with upturned faces. They all gesticulated to her violently. Mignon, in great exasperation, shook his fists at her. Steiner, Fontan, Bordenave and the others, opened their arms with an air of mingled uneasiness and reproach; while Daguenet, in order not to compromise himself, smoked his cigar with his arms behind his back.

"It is true, my dear," said Lucy, as she turned around. "I did promise them that you should come down. They are calling us now!"

Rose raised herself from the box where she was leaning. She murmured softly:

"I am coming; I am coming. It is very true—she needs me no longer. A Sister will come, I suppose."

And she wandered about, looking for her hat and her shawl. She mechanically poured some water into a basin, and bathed her hands and face, talking all the time.

"I don't know, I am sure. This has been a terrible shock to me. We never have been very kind toward each other; but I am foolish; and I have had all sorts of ideas—a longing to die myself, and a feeling as if the end of the world had come. Yes, I need fresh air, and then I shall be all right."

The air in the room was frightful; and the panic began.

"Come; we must go," said Gaga; "it is not healthy here."

They were going out, with a glance toward the bed. Rose looked around to see that all was in order. She drew a curtain before the open window; then she thought that the lamp was not suitable, and that there ought to be a candle, and lighting those in the bronze candelabra on the chimney-piece, she placed them on the night table by the side of the body. A flood of light suddenly fell on the dead woman. How terrible she was!

"Ah! she is changed—much changed," murmured Rose Mignon, who remained until the last. She went away, and closed the door. Nana was alone, with her face upturned in the light of the candles. She was a mass of corruption—a shovelful of flesh thrown there. The pustules had covered her entire face, one touching the other—every feature was undistinguishable; the left eye was gone; the other, half unclosed, was like a dark hole; a red crust was on one cheek, and invaded the mouth; the expression of which was drawn into a terrible likeness of a smile. And over and about this appalling mask was the beautiful, sunny hair like threads of living gold. Venus was decomposing. It was as if the misery drawn by her from the streets—the wretchedness with which she had overwhelmed a people—had gone up to her own face and left its mark upon it!

The chamber was empty. Another desperate shout rose from the Boulevard, and swayed the curtain:

"On to Berlin! On to Berlin! On to Berlin!"

THE END.

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